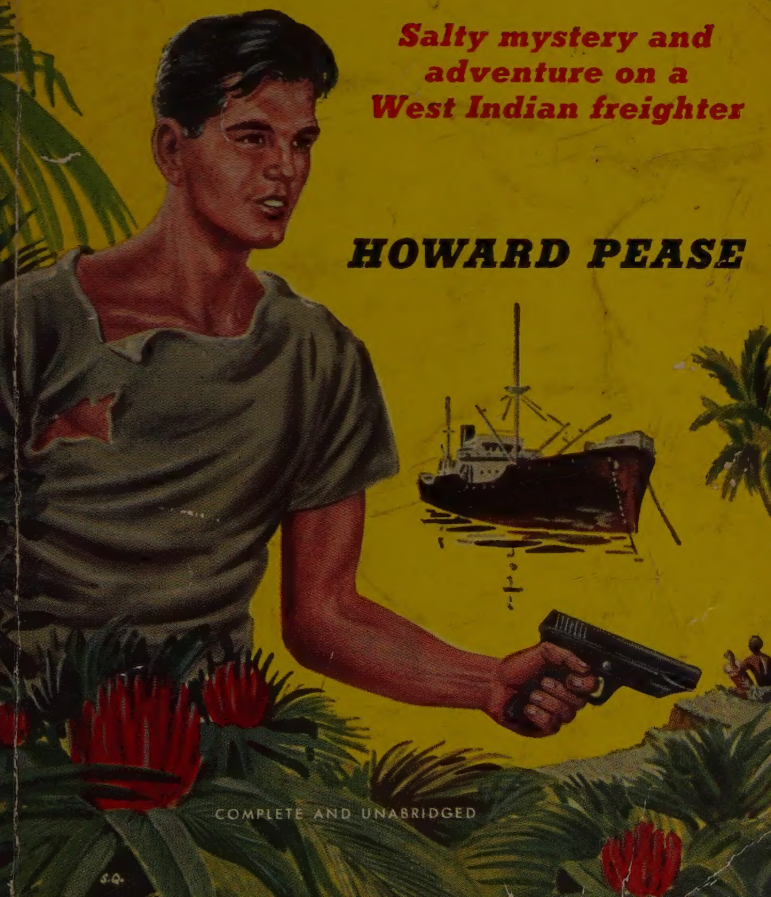


THE JINX SHIP

POCKET BOOK
35¢
Jr.

*Salty mystery and
adventure on a
West Indian freighter*

HOWARD PEASE



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

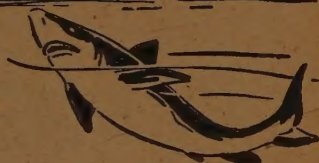
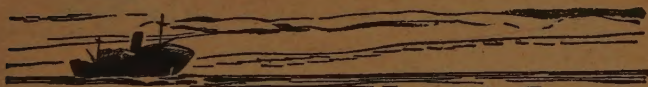
Greg Davis



Like the hero of The Jinx Ship, Howard Pease also shipped out as a wiper in the Black Gang of a freighter. In

all, he has written more than a dozen stories of the sea, of which this is the second Tod Moran book.

*The Dark Adventure That Befell Tod Moran When
He Shipped as Fireman Aboard the Tramp Steamer
"Congo," Bound out of New York for Caribbean Ports*



THE JINX SHIP

BY
HOWARD PEASE

A POCKET



BOOK, JR.

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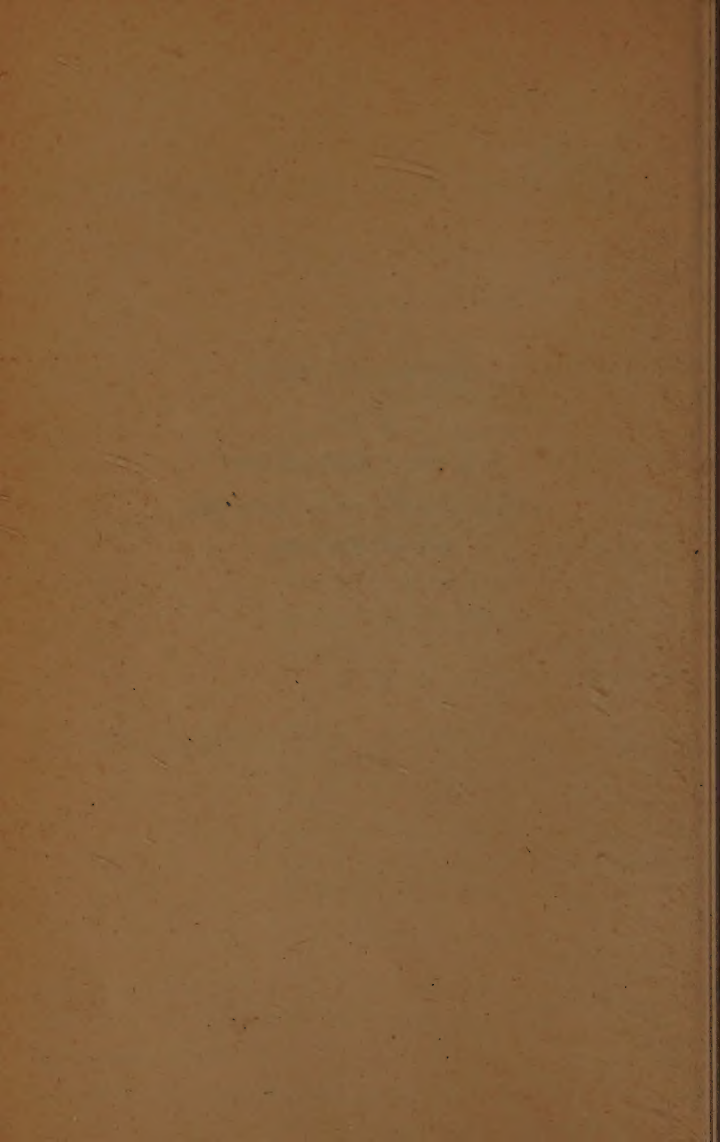
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TO
THE BLACK GANG
OF THE
S. S. "K. I. Luckenbach"

*in whose forecastle, one Caribbean night,
this story was begun*



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THE JINX SHIP





PART ONE

SEA TRAMPS

New York

Friday, June 25

For Havana and Caribbean Ports.—Denton
Fruit Co.'s Stmr. Congo, Captain Barry
(Freight Only). Leaves Bay St. Pier at 10 pm.
N. Y. Shipping Guide

CHAPTER I

SHIPPING OUT

S.S. ORION—CHINA AND RETURN. ONE A. B. AND TWO OILERS.

The shipping master swung about from the blackboard and faced the throng of eager seamen. "Only experienced hands wanted," he called out in a gruff voice.

Tod Moran stepped back, disheartened. For ten days he had vainly searched the New York water front for a berth. And for ten days he had returned at night, foot-sore and weary, to the employment bureau of the Seamen's Institute. In that prison-like room, two flights below street level, he waited with a hundred anxious seamen, all looking for a job. Each ring of the telephone sent the boy pressing forward to the office window. Always this same mounting hope within him, as rapturous as a sudden landfall, followed by the same rebuff—only experienced hands wanted.

A wave of intense loneliness swept over him; its chill depression crept about his heart. Would a call never come for a mess boy or a wiper in the engine room of a freighter bound through the Canal for San Francisco? He was alone in a great city which was cold and indifferent to strangers within its gates; and he was broke, dead broke, three thousand miles from home.

Again came the sharp ring of the telephone. At once the group of men surged forward. Eagerly they watched the shipping master turn from his desk and write upon the blackboard:

S. S. Congo—Havana and Caribbean ports. Three firemen and two wipers.

A ripple of amused laughter ran over the group. The men moved away from the window. Tod sprang eagerly forward. Here was his chance—a wiper in the engine room! No experience was needed for that. He stretched his hand through the iron grille of the window and dropped his seaman's book upon the desk.

"Fireman?" asked the man.

"No—wiper."

"Good." He glanced over Tod's book, took a red card from a file, and quickly filled it in. "Better go right down to the dock. Your ship is sailing tonight."

Tod grasped the card with a trembling hand. Sailing tonight! The words sang through the air. Instantly his depression vanished in a flash of exultation. This was life—this was living! He was sailing south for the Caribbees.

With a relieved sigh, he threw open his old blue pilot coat, took his cap from his head, and ran his fingers wearily through his sandy hair. He had thought he'd never make it. A night on a bench in Battery Park had been facing him, or a bed in some dark doorway along the dockside. Here, instead, was a snug berth with three meals a day on a freighter bound for tropic seas. By golly, he was in luck at last!

A hand grasped his arm. "You little fool," said a burly seaman. "That old tramp's no good."

Tod flung off the detaining grip. He wouldn't listen to such folly! At the door he halted to see who was signing on with him. They'd get their dunnage from the check room, Tod told himself, then go down to the dock together. No seamen crowded to the window, however. That was strange—no one was signing on!

"The *Congo's* a jinx," called a voice. "You're crazy."

Tod hurried up the stairs. These ignorant sailors were superstitious. Did they take him for a fool, too? No wonder they never got a job; they were too blamed critical. Flushed, exultant, he came out into the crowded lobby, that meeting place of sailormen from all the world. A policeman stood at his station near the door; another patrolled the sombre room.

A voice suddenly struck Tod into attention. "Blimey, this is a bloomin' jail," shrilled a little cockney sailor. "An' yet we pays thirty-five cents fer a bunk, fifteen cents fer a shower, and twenty-five cents fer the priv'lege of washin' our duds. Gawd strike me pink if I don't think I'll 'it some bloke over the 'ead with a marlinspike and go to jail fer it. We gets the same there—free!"

Tod turned swiftly toward a group of men standing before the dark windows. Here was luck again—this was a voice he knew!

"Toppy," he called. "Toppy."

At his words a small seaman separated himself from the group and came toward him. In spite of the shapeless cap pulled low over his pale eyes, the frayed blue sweater and dungarees, and the well-worn shoes, the man approached with a cheerful, swaying stride. "Blimey, if it ain't our mess boy Joe Macaroni." He showed his yellow fangs in a grin.

"How do you happen to be here, Topy?"

"Here? Say, kid, when you've been to sea as long as me, you'll know that you always meets a friend in a Sail-

ors' Institute. That's the one blarsted good thing about 'em. But I'm goin' 'ome. I'm lookin' fer a bloomin' berth fer London."

Tod's face glowed. "I just got a job as wiper! Going to Havana and the Caribbean."

"Wot on?"

"A Denton Fruit Company freighter—the *Congo*."

"The *Congo*?" Toppo's eyes grew wide. "Kid, are you looney? That's no good. That's the bloody jinx ship!"

"The jinx ship? Aw, I don't believe it."

Toppo's thin face grew grim. "I ain't kiddin' yer, Joe Macaroni. You didn't see no sailors rushin' for'd to the window, did you? They all know that old tramp. She's a jinx, that's wot. You don't know nothin' about 'er, or you wouldn't talk that way. She ain't never 'ad a decent voyage. Always runs into another ship or 'its a rock. Last passage back from Brazil she was in quarantine, with three seamen dead and 'arf the crew sick. This time some-thin' worse 'appened, but nobody knows wot. The *Congo*'s a funny bird. Now she's tryin' to get a new crew, but she can't. We sailors are too wise fer 'er."

Tod gave a short laugh. "Aw, that's all superstition."

"I don't care wot yer calls it." Toppo spat viciously. "Every passage out is worse than the last one. No, kid, yer ain't goin' ter sign on that ship." He paused and surveyed Tod with a smile of delight. "It's been a year, ain't it, since we shipped together on that ole tub, the *Araby*? I thought you went back ter school."

"I did," Tod returned; "I'm out to earn some money to take me through next year. I came east with Captain Jarvis on the *Araby*, but she was ordered to Hamburg and Heaven knows where else. That voyage was too long for me, so I signed off here. Sent most of my money home. Thought sure I'd get a berth in a week. But shipping's no good."

"An' I'm on the beach, too," Toppo grinned. "Been

broke fer five days an' sleepin' on a park bench. But I ain't down in the marf. Blimey, no! I kin still larf."

"You're a card, Toppo."

"Cheerio, ole dear. You see, I'm waitin' fer a ship bound fer London. I ain't been 'ome fer nine years—an' now I'm goin'. Yessir—it's London fer me."

Tod looked up quickly. "Why don't you come on the *Congo*? We'll go together."

"That bloomin' jinx? Not fer a thousan'. No, not fer a million. An' you ain't goin' either."

"Well, I'll think it over."

Toppo looked at him keenly. "You'd better. Listen, Joe Macaroni: the *West Montara* just got in from Seattle. Go dawn ter pier eighteen. You might be able ter sign on. She's takin' lumber up the 'Udson to Poughkeepsie; then she's goin' ter the West Indies and on ter Frisco."

Frisco! Tod's heart leaped. "That's just what I want."

"See you later, then. I met a frien' a minute ago who just got in. 'E's good fer a couple o' square meals. So long." Toppo disappeared into the midst of the crowd of men.

Tod hesitated for a moment. Perhaps Toppo was right. He'd better try for a job on this West Coast freighter and forget the steamer *Congo*. If the sailors gave a ship a bad name, there was without doubt a pretty good reason for it. There was no sense in walking straight into trouble. No—he'd try this other ship.

He went slowly out the door into the night, where a mist-like rain was falling, and turned to the left, away from Battery Park. The dock lights gleamed wanly in the gloom. Along the quiet water front he plodded, past great covered piers that loomed sombrely above him. From the harbour came the low blare of a steamer's whistle, then silence once more closed down about him.

At Pier 18 he encountered a ship's officer coming from the gate. Tod stopped him and asked in an eager voice:

"What's the chance, sir, of a job on the *West Montara*? Do they need a mess boy or an ordinary seaman?"

"Nothing doing," the man pronounced gruffly. "We got a full crew. You're about the fiftieth man who's asked for a berth. No wonder you birds are always out of a job—you jump ship at every port."

"Yes, sir."

As the man moved onward, Tod heard a clock strike ten. Chilled and depressed, the boy tramped wearily forward. Two seamen swayed past, singing and laughing loudly, then the dockside became utterly deserted. Not even a light shone from the pier offices. Was there, perhaps, a cozy berth awaiting him there behind one of those closed gates? Presently he paused. He looked up in startled surprise. He had stopped before a huge gate above which he made out the words: Denton Fruit Co.

What had brought him there? Surely he had no thought of signing on the tramp freighter *Congo* with its record of disaster. And yet, and yet . . . Was that not better than starving, than freezing of nights in some shadowy nook along the dockside? And here was a snug berth awaiting him on a ship bound south for the Caribbees. Yes; he'd take it. All that talk of the seamen was sheer superstition. By thunder, he wasn't afraid!

He turned to the gate. His knock echoed weirdly through the street. Breathless, he waited. A step sounded on the other side of the door. Slowly it opened and revealed the face of the night watchman. "What do you want?" he greeted angrily.

"A job," Tod answered in a voice that seemed lost in the vastness of the night. "I've got a wiper's card from the Seamen's Institute."

"Well, you're just in time," the watchman went on with something like pity in his tone. "She'll be under way in an hour now. They need men all right." He stepped aside to let Tod enter. "Two A. B.'s just walked

off with all their gear. Wouldn't even stay one night, they wouldn't."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing. They just didn't like the looks o' her."

"Is there any truth in these jinx stories?"

The watchman laughed shortly. "I dunno. Only the *Congo* ain't what you'd call a popular ship. You'll find the gangway straight down the pier."

Tod paused uncertainly. He recalled the warning of the old seaman in the employment bureau, the laughter and derisive calls of the men as he climbed the stairs, the startled horror upon Toppy's face at mention of the *Congo*. He felt his heartbeats quicken.

"If you want a job, you better hurry aboard," advised the watchman.

"All right. I'll go," Tod answered.

As he went forward in the dimly lighted warehouse, he saw great cargoes piled high, fading into obscurity above. Far down the roadway between these, a light burned near the gangway. Here the boy paused and gazed up eagerly, almost fearfully, at the port side of the old freighter.

She was evidently a coal burner of more than three thousand tons. Her hull was red with rust, and her white superstructure caked with grime. From the boat deck, where lifeboats hung on davits, a single funnel extended up into the night. A black column of smoke issuing from it was at once pressed downward by the mist. Tod carefully stepped up the cleats of the gangway. At the top he discerned a small blackboard on which was chalked the note: *Sailing at 10 p. m.* Below this was a date four days old.

On the forward deck a quartermaster blocked his path. "Member of the crew?" he asked in a tone evincing no interest.

"Yes—wiper," Tod replied in a tremulous voice.

The quartermaster nodded. "All right. Go aft to the firemen's fo'c'sle."

Tod thanked him. By thunder, the job was his! He almost smiled as he turned to the bulwarks. Gazing across the covered hatch, he felt his mounting pulse abruptly stilled. An obscure dread softly closed about his heart. What mystery lurked beneath those dark decks? What secret, sinister and appalling, had sent the former crew scuttling down the gangway like rats running from danger, and checked the penniless seamen in the Institute from signing on? He listened, puzzled yet comforted; for the only sound was the soft lap of the flooding tide as it washed against the hull.

Slowly, he started aft. Glancing up at the bridge, he made out dark clad figures moving about, evidently making ready for departure. Behind him, a winch screeched suddenly where several seamen, under the boatswain's vigilant eye, were placing the hatch cover on number one hold. The boy went down the port alleyway, past the galley with its warm smell of food, past the seamen's messroom to the darkness of the after deck. Here he stumbled over cables strewn about, crossed over a tarpaulin, and made his way to the after house rising from the stern. In the centre of the cabin an electric bulb illuminated a sign which read: Firemen's Forecastle.

Swinging back the iron door, he stepped over the high storm step. At once the smell of stale tobacco smoke, damp clothing, and unwashed bodies smote his nostrils. Above a littered table, a small globe, burning in the deck head, revealed the shadowy outlines of the forecastle which curved around the stern of the ship. Without surprise, Tod observed soiled clothing filling every available corner, and half-smoked cigarettes strewn on the floor with a discarded pack of playing cards.

Closing the door behind him, Tod went down the three iron steps. The heavy, uneasy breathing of several men caused the boy to look more closely at the bunks

which, two tiers high, encircled the cabin. Of the dozen bunks belonging to the Black Gang, only three were now occupied. On four others lay blue dunnage bags. Tod chose an upper berth near a porthole; pulling back the single blanket, none too clean, he found beneath it only an old straw mattress. Compared with a night in Battery Park, he told himself, this didn't look so bad.

A sound behind him made him turn. A man in a bunk opposite surveyed him closely. "You signing on?" he asked. "Well, take my advice and git ashore while you can." He turned over with an oath and relapsed at once into an uneasy sleep.

Tod stood silent a moment, then, with a sigh, he pulled off his coat. Abruptly the sound of footsteps outside the door made him go to a porthole and glance out. Three seamen were drawing in the hawser. A tug puffed alongside. "Let go aft," called a voice.

Beneath his feet the boy felt the first throb of the propeller. His pulse began to beat in his ears. "Well, jinx or not, I'm going now," he muttered.

The huge warehouse slipped away. The rumble of the steering apparatus came from below. "Three meals a day and a place to sleep," Tod thought hopefully. "That's not so bad." As he smoothed the blanket on his bunk he saw with amazement that his hand trembled.

Footfalls came aft on the steel deck. The iron door of the forecastle slowly opened. "Here's two more dirty firemen," said the quartermaster's voice. "They're filled to the scuppers with booze. Put 'em to bed, someone."

In surprise, Tod stepped back as two bodies toppled down the steps. One was a huge Swede who sat up with a sheepish expression upon his pink face. "Yiminy, my head!" he wailed.

The other arrival was a small seaman who suddenly began threshing his arms about in the dim night light. "Blimey, if we ain't got a berth fer London at last," said a voice.

Tod started. He reached up to the deckhead and switched on another light. Glancing down, he met the widened gaze of Toppy.

"W'y, if it ain't Joe Macaroni," the little cockney sang out joyously. "Come along, kid, an' I'll show yer the whole bally town."

Speechless for a second, Tod at length quavered, "But, Toppy, you've made a mistake."

Toppy sat up and blinked. "Drank too bloomin' much," he murmured, "that's our mistake. But Swede an' I had great luck, kid. Remember he was on the *Araby*? Never again an old tub like that fer us! We're goin' 'ome, ain't we, Swede?"

"Yah, we got luck this time."

"Luck!" cried Tod. "We're not going to London. We're bound for the Caribbean."

"Wot?" Toppy, once more on his feet, swayed toward the door.

The Swede's big, doglike eyes opened in consternation. "Quick! We go ashore, matey."

Toppy lurched up the steps to the door. He pulled back the iron cleat and stumbled over the casing to deck. Swaying drunkenly, he surveyed the distance slowly widening between the ship and the dock lights.

As he sprang to the bulwarks, Tod caught him. "It's too late, Toppy! Don't you see we're in midstream? You're too pie-eyed to swim for it."

Tod held him while a stream of oaths ripped across the black water. "What a blarsted idiot I am! An' I thought I was goin' 'ome ter London. Say," he added suspiciously, as he glanced about the littered deck, "wot ship is this?"

"The *Congo*."

From Toppy's lips came a cry of rage and horror. "Gawd strike me blinel!" he shrilled. "The jinx ship!"

UNKNOWN CARGO

TOD MORAN STOOD BY THE STARBOARD BULWARKS IN THE DARKNESS OF the after deck, watching the docks slowly slip past. He had helped Swede Jorgenson and Toppy into their bunks, where immediately they had fallen into profound slumber. As yet they were hardly aware of what had befallen them; but on the morrow, Tod knew, they would awake to full knowledge of their predicament.

The night was damp and cold; a mist obscured the stars. From the harbour came the long-drawn wail of a foghorn. Before Tod's eyes the vague outline of the city rose dark and sombre. On the pier heads, red and green lights were reflected on the darkness of the water. A tug passed noisily at the head of a string of barges, going up river with the flood tide. Presently Tod noticed that the *Congo* was swinging to port, heading for the Brooklyn shore. He turned and, crossing the deck between the after hatches, leaned over the port rail, wet and dirty from the fog and coal dust.

The freighter slid quietly up to a Brooklyn pier. The boy saw a single light gleaming along the dockside, saw a pile of cargo reposing on the wharf. From the bridge came the harsh rasp of the captain's order. The quivering deck became suddenly still; seamen threw out the hawsers, which were caught by a watchman and made fast to iron bollards on the pier.

Going forward by the port alleyway, Tod observed that number two hatch was uncovered, ready to receive its cargo. A winch rattled as the derrick boom sent out its long arm. A net of boxes was lifted quickly through the air to disappear into the hold. Tod, gazing about

him, became aware of a sense of secrecy and haste. The hoarse, careful tones of the tall, thin second mate as he directed the loading, the darkness of the warehouse with only a single light near the cargo, all set his thoughts racing. What was this cargo that they took on so furtively at midnight?

He looked more closely and saw that the cases were long and narrow. They were heavy, too, for the seamen who worked on the wharf grumbled at their weight. Why were not stevedores loading them? He noticed also that the captain nervously paced the bridge, that the second mate glanced with relief every few moments at the rapidly diminishing pile of boxes on the wharf.

Tod suddenly remembered that here was an opportunity for Toppy and Swede Jorgenson to get ashore. At once he hurried back to the firemen's forecastle.

He shook the little cockney without result. "Toppy, wake up! We're at a Brooklyn dock."

"Go 'way," Toppy murmured thickly. "I won't go on any bloomin' watch. Goin' ter sleep all day."

"Get up!" Tod went on, shaking him by the arm.

No response came, however, to his most violent efforts. Jorgenson, too, could not be aroused. He slept the sleep of the dead. Tod at last gave up the task and climbed once more to deck.

In the stillness of the night, he heard a tug coming up astern of them. From its deck came a hail. "Is that the *Congo*?"

An order sounded from the bridge. The rattle of the winch died away. Silence enveloped the freighter.

"Is that the *Congo*?"

At length from the bridge came a gruff reply in the affirmative. The tug ran in alongside the pier behind them, and Tod saw two men hurry along the wharf. Soon they emerged into the light of the forward deck. Tod gazed at them, fascinated. The first was a youth who strode eagerly toward the gangway; the second, an

elderly man who was bent beneath the weight of a suitcase and two travelling bags.

Curious, Tod went forward. Pausing in the starboard alleyway, he found the captain awaiting these new arrivals. The master of the *Congo* was visibly nervous. His short, paunchy figure stood near the gangway. Beneath his officer's cap, his round, bearded face was creased in a frown. "What do ye want?" he greeted them in a surly voice.

Without answering, the youth led the way to deck. There he paused. "Are you Captain Barry?"

"I am," the captain grunted.

The young man's face lighted up with a smile. "I thought I'd missed the ship, Captain; so I chartered a tug to overtake you. This is luck. My name's Bruce Harvey. I've a letter to you from the owners."

The captain swore softly beneath his breath. "Let's have it."

As the youth passed the letter over, his eyes gazed in delight about the deck. His companion, who Tod realized was evidently an old house servant, moved forward and placed the luggage on the deck. Tod heard him whisper, "It looks rather dirty here, Mr. Bruce. Do you think you can endure it?"

"Sure I can. This is great."

The captain stirred uneasily as he looked the newcomer over, noting the trim clothes upon his well-built figure, the keen, handsome face, and the hat pitched at a rakish angle over his dark eyes. "Are ye ready to work?" he asked at length.

An engaging smile broke over the youth's face. "Aye, aye, sir."

In astonishment the captain stared. Tod turned away, unable to repress a chuckle. Did this lubber think he was on a windjammer? Had he been reading *Two Years Before the Mast*?

"What do ye want a job on this ship for?" snapped

the captain. "We've got enough green hands on her as it is."

"But I'm not afraid of work, sir. You see, I just got kicked out of college, and the pater said I'd have to do something. I thought I'd like to take to sea. Only been on a passenger liner before. Mr. Denton is a friend of ours, so he said you'd give me a job."

Captain Barry frowned quickly. "Oh, he did! Well, I've signed on a full crew. Very sorry."

Disappointment clouded the youth's face. "Mr. Denton—" He stopped, and Tod was aware that the owner's name was sending the captain into a spasm of fury.

"Wait a minute," Captain Barry choked out at last. "Maybe the chief can give ye a job in the engine room. Do ye think ye could take a fireman's job?" There was a sneer in his voice.

"Sure—anything."

Tod saw the young man's companion step unexpectedly forward. "Don't work him too hard, Captain, will you? You see he's never earned a penny in his life; he doesn't know what work is. And I feel certain his father wouldn't approve of this ship, sir."

The captain's eyes widened as he choked back his astonishment.

The youth frowned. "You may go now," he said quietly. "Tell the family I'll write from Havana."

"Yes, sir." The man spoke in a hopeless, uncertain manner. "Good-bye, Mr. Bruce. I hope you return safely, sir." Muttering disapprovals to himself, he went down the gangway to the wharf, where he stood for a moment surveying the rusty tramp. He sighed once, shook his head still in disapproval, and then moved off toward the tug.

Captain Barry's voice brought Tod back to the scene on deck. "Young man," he was saying, "do ye realize that we show no favours on this ship? If ye sign on as a member of the Black Gang, ye'll be treated like the rest.

Ye'll live in their quarters and eat their grub. And I advise ye not to mention the owner's name again. That's all bilge."

"Oh, yes, sir. Of course I don't expect favours, Captain. I want a change from shore life."

"Ye'll git it," the little captain answered grimly. "And see that ye address the officers as 'sir.' Now go aft." He turned and, seeing Tod, asked quickly, "Are ye a member of the Black Gang?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then show this young cub to his quarters. I'm sure he'll be pleased."

"Thanks, Captain." The new member of the firemen's fore-castle picked up his luggage and followed Tod down the alleyway. "Say, this appears to be a gay old tub, doesn't it? Are you a fireman?"

"No—a wiper."

"Oh, I see."

At the tone, distant and cold, Tod felt the blood slowly mount to his face. For the first time he was acutely aware of the fact that his clothes were not pressed and that his suitcase was lying in the checking room of the Seamen's Institute. Well, he couldn't help it; he'd get what he needed from the steward's slop chest.

Tod smiled uncertainly. "You surely chose a queer ship for your first voyage."

"Did I?" Bruce Harvey laughed. "Well, she looks mighty good to me. My fraternity brothers said I wouldn't go through with it. Wait till I get back! I'll bowl them over with stories. They'll be green with envy.—Where are you from? Oh, San Francisco. Well, I've a friend at college who's a Native Son. Rum bird, too." He stumbled over a cable. "Say, old chap, don't we have any lights on this deck?"

As Tod opened the door of the fore-castle, Bruce Harvey paused and sniffed. "Good Heavens, do we sleep in this pigsty?"

Tod nodded, a smile wrinkling the corners of his mouth. Bruce stepped gingerly down the three steps and surveyed the shadowy compartment in silence.

"Choose your bunk," Tod said in a low tone, so he would not disturb the sleeping men.

"All the good bunks gone, of course," Bruce continued in a loud, querulous voice. "Well, I'll take that top one. Thank heavens, there's a porthole near it." He threw his luggage on his bunk, then turned to gaze at the littered floor. "Gosh, let's go on deck."

Without a word, Tod followed. They seated themselves on number four hatch just outside the forecastle door, and Bruce brought forth a cigarette case. "Have one?"

"Can't smoke any place on the after deck," Tod informed him. "There's too much danger from fire."

In surprise, Tod saw the older youth calmly light a cigarette and puff slowly. "Whose orders?" he asked.

The cool note of insolence in his voice made Tod inwardly tremble. In silence he rose and went to the bulwarks. A shrill blast from the ship's whistle sounded through the misty night. The *Congo* slipped astern into the river, turned, and steamed south for the harbour. Disputing voices behind him made Tod whirl.

"Who's smoking on this hatch?" A stream of oaths, low and obscene, cut the air. Tod glimpsed the tall, angular form of the second mate standing over Bruce Harvey.

The new member of the Black Gang rose and calmly asked, "Speaking to me?"

"Speakin'? You bum, I'll heave yuh overboard." The second mate's right arm drew back. A faint thud sounded as Bruce Harvey collapsed on the hatch. "Talk back, do yuh? I'll show you bums! Now git back to yer cubby-hole, wharf rat!"

Bruce struggled to his elbow in a fury of rage. He wiped his lip where Tod knew the blood must be flow-

ing. "That'll do, Mr. Bully," Bruce uttered furiously. "Why can't you ask me as a gentleman would?"

The second mate made a gesture of exasperation. "Like a gentleman—hell! Oh, it's the college boy, is it? So he thinks he's still home with his mamma!" He laughed deep within his throat. "Well, you'll learn yuh ain't. Break rules, will you? If we hadn't left the slip, I'd toss yuh ashore. Now, git!"

Bruce looked around the dark deck as though seeking help. Evidently the thought had flashed through him for the first time that he had left his old world behind. He struggled for a moment to control himself, then he stumbled aft to the firemen's quarters and vanished below.

The mate swung on his heel and went forward, swearing softly. Tod turned away. Under his hand the tremor of the ship's engines moved the bulwarks with a soft vibration. The *Congo* had left the East River and was steaming out the harbour. Low on the water ahead, a light winked at regular intervals through the mist. On the starboard beam the luminous portholes of an arriving liner slid past. Abruptly Tod's pulse mounted. He looked ahead in ecstasy. Beneath his feet he felt the deck slowly lift to meet the first long swell of the Atlantic.

At that instant the steady thud of a hammer came from the forward deck. The carpenter was battening down the cover of number two hatch. As he stood there listening, a sense of foreboding, mysterious and ominous, swept like a wave over the boy.

With unknown cargo in her holds, the *Congo* steamed out to sea.



CHAPTER III

"LESS THAN THE DUST . . ."

AT SIX BELLS THE BLACK GANG WAS ROUSED BY THE CALL OF THE WATCH. Tod sat up with a yawn and surveyed the forecastle. A gray dawn, filtering through the cloudy glass of the portholes, revealed the dark tier of disordered bunks, and the table half-hidden by castoff dungarees, sweat rags, and firemen's caps. Several men were dressing below him, and Tod, gazing at them curiously, decided that never before had he seen five more tattered hoboes.

The close air reeked with stale tobacco smoke. In surprise, Tod saw that the porthole above him was clamped shut. As he flung it open, the morning air struck his nostrils with its invigorating, salty tang.

"Harvey, wake up!" Tod called across the bunk.

"Time to work?" Bruce asked cheerfully. "Now, who do you suppose had the nerve to close all these portholes? I opened every blamed one before I turned in."

Tod smiled. "It must have been the stokers who came off watch at four o'clock. They get so used to the heat and dust below that they can't stand the cold."

Bruce lay contentedly gazing up at the glass of the skylight, which opened on to the poop deck above. Tod

jumped to the floor, and after shaking Toppy into wakefulness, roused the Swede.

"Yiminy, my head!" the latter grunted. "Where are we, matey?"

"Don't arsk me," Toppy grinned sourly. "We're on the bloody *Congo*."

Swede Jorgenson let the words sink in. Tod saw that his muddled brain was making a valiant effort to grasp the situation.

"Wait till I get back to ole New York," Toppy snarled. "When I get 'old of that bloke who shipped me, I'll break 'is bloomin' neck." Suddenly he glanced up at Bruce Harvey, and his eyes widened. "Strike me bline, if 'e ain't sleepin' in blue pajamas! Wot a toff 'e is!"

Bruce kindled with anger. "Cut the remarks to the gallery, Bozo."

"Well, ain't 'e 'ard-boiled, now! 'E wants ter be a sailor, 'e does."

A small dark-eyed coal-passer whom Tod had heard addressed as Frenchie, now turned from the table and grinned. "I heard all about that bird in the stokehole last night. He's a college boy; got a job through the owners, or the chief wouldn't have him."

"Me eye! 'Is name must be in the New York stud book."

Bruce regarded Toppy with a look of scorn. "Listen, old dear, old thing, old top," he calmly enunciated with an ironical ring in his voice, "if one's family happens to date back to the Revolution, does that give a Britisher the privilege of surmising that the last heir and hope of a First Family is not belligerent?"

Toppy's little eyes opened wide. "Oh, Gawd," he muttered at last, "'e talks like a mission bloke."

"Key down, Toppy," Tod smiled. "It serves you right. There's probably enough trouble on this ship without you making any more."

"Yah, that's right," Swede Jorgenson grunted in approval. "Toppy always got his fly trap open."

The little Londoner slipped into a singlet and a pair of blue dungarees. "Cawn't a blighter say nothin' in 'is own fo'c'sle? Go ter sleep, you big squarehead."

"Well, I see this is going to be a nice, cheerful, friendly crowd," Bruce remarked as he finished dressing. "We'll have a gay old voyage."

"Gay?" Toppo returned. "Just wait till the jinx gets ter work."

At these words, the firemen shuffled uneasily up the steps to deck. Tod, glancing over at Bruce, saw that he was clad in an old pair of corduroys and a blue shirt open at the throat. "All ready to work?" Tod smiled.

"Sure. This isn't so bad. Where do we wash?"

"Just the other side of the bulkhead—to starboard. Come on."

Tod led the way to deck. The *Congo* rolled gently as she steamed south across a sea green and choppy. Low on the starboard beam a dark reach of land was visible; overhead, gulls wheeled and screamed against a leaden sky.

The ringing of the breakfast gong soon sounded amidships, and the men tramped forward. The firemen's mess room lay abaft the engine-room entrance, with doors opening into both the port and starboard alleyways. Here the seamen ate at one end of the long table, the Black Gang at the other. At meals only did the two factions meet, for the seamen's quarters lay forward in the bow of the ship.

Bruce pushed aside his tin bowl of rolled oats with its watery milk, and in disgust turned away from the fried salt pork and dry bread. The coffee, however, he sipped slowly.

"You'll get used to it," Tod encouraged.

Bruce Harvey unexpectedly chuckled. "Yeah. . . . when?"

"Wot's wrong? Don't the college boy like his grub?"

Toppy asked across the table. For a totally different reason, he, too, was drinking only coffee.

"We ought to get better chow aboard," French Louie remarked. "Somebody's getting a rake-off on the grub money."

"Yeh, it's that fat steward," grumbled Panama Pete. "Is this the kind o' eats we git all the voyage? I'll make a kick to the chief—"

"Be yourself, man—be yourself," broke in a voice from the seamen's end of the table. "Do ye think the chief or the skipper cares what we eat? When the cook bakes fresh bread, he gives it ter the officers, and we git the stale stuff. An' when we don't eat the bread, the cook throws it inter a dish with six raisins an' a little water an' calls it puddin'. Do yer expect to git apple pie like the officers? Be yerself. Pass Lot's Wife! Thanks."

"Oh, Gawd, wot a ship!"

At that moment the mess man, a huge Negro, entered from the galley with a pot of coffee.

"Feelin' better, mess?" asked a grizzled seaman.

"Ah always feels good," replied the Negro.

"Yeh, how about last night when I met you on the upper deck? Scared white you was. Ain't that the truth?"

The mess man's black face quivered in perturbation.

"Man, Ah don't know what yo' all's talkin' about."

"Don't lie, mess. You know you an' me both heard the jinx."

The words struck the mess room into silence. Toppy set down his tin cup with a clatter. "Wot's that? You heard the jinx already?"

Tod, gazing down the table, perceived that the old seaman was serious. The men leaned closer, listening.

"Somethin' mighty funny happened last night," went on the man. "I was patrolling the after deck in the middle watch. Everything was still; only a little wind in the rigging, when I hears a kind of moaning sound floatin' aft. I stops by number three hatch to listen. Again I hears it,

from right above me—a long, low wail, almost like a kid. I'm telling you my hair stood on end. Then I hears footsteps on the deck above. I thought as how somethin' had happened, so I runs up the ladders past the engineers' cabins to the boat deck. It was dark there near the funnel. I bumps into a man hurrying forward. I grabs him an' he cries out. Then I sees it's the mess man. 'What you doin' here, mess?' I asks. He doesn't answer, an' I sees that he's trembling all over. Scared white, he was.

"Then it comes again—that noise. Sounded almost human. Made my blood creep, it did. 'What's that, mess?' I asks. 'Don't know, sah,' he answers. 'Is it the jinx?' I asks. The mess trembles more than ever. I lets him go then, and hunts over the deck; but can't find nothin'. Didn't hear the sound again, neither." The seaman paused and lowered his voice. "D'ye know what I think it was?—The jinx!"

"Gawd blimey!"

Tod turned his eyes on the huge Negro, who stood restlessly at the sink in the corner. "Speak up, mess," said a voice. "What do yuh know about this?"

"Ah don't know nothin'," came the low response.

Toppy's hand came down on the table with a thud. "Yer know wot that means?" he whispered. "Somethin' awful is goin' ter 'appen."

Bruce rose abruptly. "Stuff and nonsense!" he said in scorn. "Aren't you fellows grown up yet?" With a shrug, he went on deck. Presently Tod followed him.

"What a lot of bums!" Bruce remarked. "They're superstitious as well as ignorant."

Tod shook his head. "You're wrong, Bruce. They're not really superstitious; only a landsman believes that." He said no more; for he knew that, now and then, strange, inexplicable apprehensions did come to men who spent years of their lives with only a deck between them and eternity.

Bruce turned away, facing starboard where mist lay

low on the water. "What this old tub needs is some real men on her."

"Like yourself?" Tod smiled.

Bruce swung about furiously.

"Key down," said Tod quickly. "Here's the chief."

Mr. McMurtrie, the chief engineer, came toward them from the alleyway. He stopped before them, pushed back his white-topped cap from his gray hair, and calmly looked them over. "You two boys will be wipers down below," he said at length in a loud voice, as though he were still speaking above the hum of the engines. "You can sign the ship's papers in the captain's saloon after dinner."

"Yes, sir."

"Today's Sunday, so you won't work below. But I think you'd better clean up the firemen's fo'c'sle. Wash down the walls with soap and water and scrub the floors. Clean up! Understand?"

"That pigsty?" Bruce asked.

The chief frowned. "You're the college boy, are you?—Well, do you know where a wiper stands on board a ship? He's lower than a stoker, lower than a coal-passer. He's so low that he doesn't amount to more than dirt beneath our boots! Now, get busy."

Once more back in the forecandle, Tod began lifting the narrow mattresses and blankets to deck. He knew that if this was to be their quarters for the next two months or more, a general housecleaning was certainly necessary. Bruce Harvey stood near his bunk, a look of keen disgust upon his face.

"Git busy, college boy!" Toppo piped up gleefully. "Now, don't fergit ter clean up the floor under my bunk."

Tod hesitated on the steps as Bruce flung out an angry retort.

"Now, don't git peeved," Toppo went on, unperturbed. "A fireman kin always boss a wiper. Blimey, I'm goin' ter see that our nice little 'ome is kept clean an' sweet."

Tod dropped his mattress. Was there to be a fight in the forecastle this early in the voyage? As he looked across at Bruce, however, his fears relaxed.

"Well, old top," Bruce smiled, "I'm glad to know my place." He swept the blankets off a bunk with a quick gesture. In a gay, vibrant tone, his voice rang out through the forecastle:

"Less than the dust
Beneath thy greasy boots——"

Abruptly he paused and flashed at Tod a glance of sly amusement. "That's us, old thing. Less than the dust!"

FOOTFALLS IN THE NIGHT

"BY THUNDER, THAT'S THE CRY OF THE JINX!" THE WORDS CAME, MUFFLED, from Tod Moran's lips.

He sat alone on number three hatch in the profound darkness of the after deck. About him the deck, the sea, the sky were only a curtain of misty black. With a nervous movement, he raised his head. Again came the sound—a low moan carried aft on the breeze. Tod felt his hair softly stir. What did this strange sound mean? Were the seamen right in their conjecture? Was he himself believing all these stories about this disastrous tramp freighter?

Four bells sounded from the bridge. Ten o'clock. In his forecastle he knew the men off watch were playing cards, discussing passages good and bad, or weaving yarns of some far port on the other side of the world.

Still he sat there, quietly listening. He downed the fear that welled up within him. Looking aft, he was reassured to see the two portholes of his forecastle glowing like round, luminous eyes. A freshening breeze with its wisps of fog cooled his feverish cheek. From the wireless shack high above drifted the staccato notes of a message winging its way through the night.

The next instant Tod sharply caught his breath. Directly behind him on the port side, footfalls were approaching. The sound quickened his pulse. He turned and strained his eyes toward the bulwarks. Blackness encompassed the ship; he made out nothing. Of a sudden the footfalls stopped. Tod held his breath. He knew that the dark form of a man, barefooted, stood only a few feet from him, listening.

Then from aft a faint whispering sound swept toward them like a gentle gust of wind. It swept by the hatch toward the dark companionway which led to the upper decks. Tod was aware of a chill that spread over him. Nothing human could move with such lightning rapidity. It had come and gone in a flash, and the man, standing there so close to him, had not even stirred.

At length Tod heard the soft footfalls swing about and follow toward the companionway. Tod rose and crossed to the bulwarks, where his hand moved nervously along the iron rail. With an effort, he pulled himself together. Again he caught the muted wail from above. He raised his head and listened. The rush of water along the starboard strake was audible. Above him he heard the soft hiss of the ship's funnel. This cry was not related to anything on the ship's rigging; it was too human. Had it come from the boat deck as the seaman had told that morning in the mess room?

Gathering courage, he went forward. He couldn't sleep in the firemen's quarters with this question still tapping at his mind. Anyway, this weird talk of a jinx was sheer superstition. He didn't believe it. By thunder, no! He'd find out.

His hand came in contact with the iron rail of the companionway. Softly he climbed the steps. He was on forbidden decks, here, for the narrow promenade which encircled the superstructure abutted on the cabins of the engineers and the petty officers. In the darkness, he crossed to the second companionway, which led above to the boat deck. At the top he paused to survey his surroundings.

Just abaft the bridge rose the funnel; on each side of this, two lifeboats hung on davits. Aft of the funnel was the engine-room skylight, glowing softly from the lights below; and facing this were four cabins which, Tod knew, probably housed the deck officers. The cabins were dark and the deck silent, save for the faint hiss of

the funnel and the throb of the engines which came up the open skylight.

Abruptly Tod became aware that the mysterious noise had recommenced. A soft moan rose and fell on the night air, dying into the stillness. Tod shivered. His glance, following the sound, fell upon the port lifeboat where it lay in its chocks covered with a tarpaulin. Did the sound come from there? Was someone hiding beneath the canvas?

Slowly he moved toward the boat. Its white sides and white cover shone ghostly in the gloom. At the gunwale he stopped. No sound came from within. Was he mistaken? His hands felt along the ropes which lashed down the cover. Of a sudden, a soft footfall made him whirl.

"What yo' doin', boy?"

It was the mess man. In the dim light Tod saw that the huge Negro was barefoot, clothed only in dungarees and a soft dark shirt which lay open on his powerful chest. Tod looked at him with widening eyes. "What do you know about this, mess?" he asked in a voice none too steady.

"Not so loud, boy," returned the mess man in a whisper. "Don't wake up the officers here." As he spoke, his teeth flashed white in the gloom.

Tod, stepping close to the man, lowered his voice. "You're hiding something here, mess. What is it? Are you trying to scare those firemen back there to death? If you are, you'd better cut it out. I'll speak to the captain."

"No, boy, no!" the Negro almost whimpered. "Don't say nothin'."

Tod perceived that fright had gripped the man; he trembled, while his eyes swept the deck as though expecting an officer to appear any moment from one of the cabins.

"You're hiding something in this lifeboat," Tod went

on. He was bluffing now, and he gained courage. "What is it? A stowaway?"

"Don't tell—don't tell," the mess man begged. "He—he's my frien'. We're goin' home to our island of San Felipe, near Haiti. The *Congo* she put in there to unload stores fo' the missionaries. Ah an' mah frien' want to git home fo' long time. We never make it, so Ah ship out as mess on the *Congo* an' hide him in there. When we git home, we stay there. Don't tell, boss! Ah'm yo' frien'."

Tod moved uneasily. Was the mess telling the truth? He doubted it; yet the man did appear sincere. But that faint wailing sound! What did it signify?

Tod stepped closer. "Why does your friend make that noise?"

The Negro's eyes wavered; his large hands moved uncertainly along his dungarees. "He—he's sick."

"Get him out, then. Do you want him to die?"

The Negro clutched Tod's hand. "No—no. He git well. Ah know. Ah make the *sign*."

"The sign? What do you mean?"

The mess man's glance swept the deck. "Hush, boss. Yo' help me, an' Ah help you." His great hand reached out and clasped Tod's arm in an iron grip. The voice was so low that the boy barely caught the words. "Ah make the good-luck sign of the voodoo. It never fail! It make yo' well—or it kill yo'."

The boy shivered. Something in the tone, so deadly sincere, so awestruck in its intensity, sent a chill into his blood. Slowly he backed away.

Behind them a door clicked. Tod spun about. From the wheel house stepped the short figure of Captain Barry. "Who's there?" he called. "Is that ye, Mr. Sharp?"

Tod felt his mouth go dry. Mr. Sharp was the second officer. What would the captain do when he found the two men on the boat deck which was forbidden them?

He saw the Negro slip away into the darkness. Swiftly Tod glided toward the companion steps.

The captain, however, was too quick for him. A hand grasped his arm. A voice cried: "Damn ye! Who are ye? What are ye doin' here?"

A light was switched on in a cabin to their right. The door opened, and the light, streaming out, revealed the angry face of the captain.

"What's wrong, sir?" It was Mr. Sharp who spoke. The striped pajamas which clothed his lanky frame only served to accentuate the tall, awkward figure.

"Don't know," snapped the captain. "Caught this young cub here. Ye belong to the Black Gang?"

"Yes, sir," Tod stammered.

"Don't ye know ye've no business on this deck? Sneaking round here in the dark, too! What do ye mean?" His scowl deepened until it brought together the thick black eyebrows.

"Hm!" grunted the second mate. A foxy smile spread over his thin face. "Looks mighty queer, if yuh asks me, sir."

Captain Barry's grasp tightened. He shook the boy. "Answer," he bellowed. "Watcha doin' here?"

"The ventilators, sir," Tod gasped. "I was trimming the stokehole ventilators, turning them to windward." His voice rambled on. "Then—then, sir, I thought I heard—the jinx."

"What?" The captain dropped Tod's arm. Surprise showed in that round, bearded face. "Ye thought ye heard the jinx?"

"He's crazy!" blurted the second mate. "That scum aft in the fo'c'sle is all like that."

A sarcastic smile twisted the bearded lips of the captain. "And did the little boy find anything?"

"No, sir—not yet."

The second mate scowled. His long face twisted into

lines of fury. "Not yet," he echoed. "We'll have ter watch this feller."

"We will, Mr. Sharp." The little captain nodded to the second mate who towered above him. With a shove, he sent the boy crashing against a cabin wall. "Now, kid, git back ter yer cubbyhole."

Tod went. He staggered down the companion, swayed against the rail as the ship rolled gently, then swung down the ladder to the dark after deck. There, a hand reached out of the night and clutched his own.

"Did yo' tell, boy?"

Tod shook his head wearily. "No. Why should I?"

The Negro sighed with delight. "Thankee, boss. Ah knows a frien' when Ah sees one. The chahm is workin'. It brings luck jus' like it brings——" He paused suddenly.

"Yes?" Tod inquired.

But the mess man did not answer. He had vanished in the darkness.

THE CABIN PASSENGER

WHEN TOD ENTERED THE FORECASTLE, HE AT ONCE PERCEIVED THAT AN undercurrent of vague foreboding gripped the men. They sat on their bunks, listening in silence to Toppy, who was evidently recounting a terrifying experience which had just overtaken him.

"Standin' right by the bloomin' patent log, I was," Toppy breathlessly narrated, "when I sees those eyes blazin' at me from the taffrail. Two green eyes wot never belonged to any man. I yells an' kicks my foot at the very spot. Wot yer think I 'it? Only a rail stanchion!"

"But what was there?" cried French Louie.

Toppy gulped. "Nothin' was there—nothin'!" He stepped back as Tod crossed to his bunk. "We'll be lucky blokes if we gets back to port alive," he added in a tone which showed that he doubted very much if they would.

"Yah, the jinx has got us all," Swede Jorgenson assented. He sighed heavily and pulled the blanket up to his neck. "No one kin sleep on this ship."

Bruce Harvey looked down from his upper bunk. His wavy brown hair was rumpled. His eyes were heavy with sleep; yet a delighted smile spread over his cleancut face. "That's positively true," he said in a derisive tone. "We're all done for. The jinx is at work." He threw back his head and laughed. Contempt crept into his face. "That's all rot," he continued; "if something is wrong with this ship, there's human beings aboard that know all about it."

"Listen ter the college boy!" Toppy threw out scornfully. "Thinks yer knows every bloomin' thing about a

ship, don't yer? An' yer ain't never been ter sea before!" He paused as a long-drawn wail of the whistle echoed weirdly through the night. "Blimey, this fog is the worst I ever saw. Whistle blows all day, and now all night." He stirred restlessly. The men looked round with questioning, furtive glances.

"I see the officers 've got a cabin passenger aboard," put in Panama Pete from his bunk. "He was lookin' over the whole ship today. I'll bet he's a Jonah."

"I don't like 'is looks, either," Toppy volunteered. "'E's a bloomin' foreigner."

"Aw, shut up," said French Louie. He was a short, solidly built coal-passer on Toppy's watch. "That passenger is no more foreign than you are, you limejuicer. He's a Spanish-American who's lived in the States for years. The bosun told me."

"Wot's 'e doin' on this 'ere ship, then? Is this a tramp freighter, or is it a passenger liner? W'y does the Old Man take passengers, I arks yer; and w'y does 'e put the bloke in the 'ospital cabin? Don't it look like the blarsted sick bay will be full o' wounded and dyin' by the time we git ter port? Gimme a coffin nail, Swede."

"This is certainly a happy crowd," Bruce said, grinning across at Tod.

"The passenger's name is Gallardo," Panama Pete went on. "He's a rich sugar-cane broker from New Orleans. That's all I know. But he's got more brains than we have. He ain't a seaman."

"Yeh, an' 'e eats with the bloomin' horfficers, too," commented Toppy. "Did yer see wot the cook gave 'em fer dinner tonight?" He stopped dramatically. "Roast beef! Yeh, strike me pink, if it wasn't roast beef. An' wot did we git?"

"Slum!" came a chorus of groans.

"Yeh, slum. That's wot we'll git fer the whole blarsted trip."

"Don't let a little thing like that worry you," said

Bruce. "You'll get the remains of that roast beef next week as hash. The cook won't forget the firemen's mess, Toppy."

Tod slipped beneath his blanket, listening to the grumbling voices droning through the forecabin. Some time later, a noise made him glance forward. A man stood in the doorway, a dark, tall man whom he had glimpsed that day on the promenade deck. The visitor closed the door quickly behind him.

Evidently a nervous fear had possession of him. As he sat down weakly on the steps, he wiped his brow. "*Nom-bre de Dios*," he muttered. "This ship! It's awful."

"What's wrong?" Bruce chuckled. "Is it the jinx again?"

The visitor pressed a slender hand against the step as he leaned forward. He spoke with suppressed emotion. "I don't know. It may be. Something has been trying to get into my cabin."

Toppy laughed shrilly. "Gawd blimey, I knew it!"

The cabin passenger, Tod saw, was a man of perhaps forty-five. His black hair grew in a pointed peak on his forehead; his smooth-shaven face, dark where the beard showed through, broke into a grim smile.

"The officers won't help me," Señor Gallardo resumed, as his keen glance passed from bunk to bunk. "The only decent one aboard this ship is the first mate. He's on duty on the bridge now. The captain and the second mate are having a wassail bout in the officers' saloon. They won't listen to me." He rose abruptly and crossed to the table. "You men think it funny that I come here, no? But I can't help it. Twice last night I heard someone try my door. Then, tonight, something woke me—like that!" He snapped his fingers, turned swiftly to the port bunks. "Someone tried my door, then lifted the porthole curtain. It was dark in my cabin, but I heard the wire hooks move at the port. I sprang up and switched on the light. Opening the door, I looked out. I couldn't see anything but fog—fog."

Tod looked at the visitor in bewilderment. Why had he come here with this story? What did he want? Tod realized that the man's nervous excitement had spread like a flood through the fore-castle. When the cabin passenger stopped before Toppy, the little Londoner jumped as though he had been struck. "Want to make some money?" the man asked. "I'll pay you well, if you sleep in my cabin tonight."

"Wot? Me? Blimey, no." Toppy edged into the far corner of his bunk. "W'y don't yer stay there yerself?"

The passenger leaned toward French Louie and lowered his voice. "Will you help me, then? There's nothing to fear. I think I know who it is. Look—I'll stay on deck and watch this fellow. You go into my cabin—it's the sick bay—and watch there. I'll give you a flashlight and a pistol. You can lock yourself in. I'll pay you well."

Tod sat up in his bunk. His breath came fast. Why shouldn't he accept Señor Gallardo's offer? Might this not give him a clue to the strange mystery of this old tramp freighter? He jumped to the floor. "I'll help you," he said with suppressed excitement.

But already French Louie had stepped forward. "All right—I'll go. Only—you watch outside, too."

"Yes, yes." Señor Gallardo's dark eyes shone. He crossed to the steps. "Come. I'll put you in my cabin. Then I'll stand watch. We catch this fellow, no?"

Tod downed his disappointment. Why had the cabin passenger chosen French Louie? The man was only a coal-passer making his first trip. Surely he wasn't interested in delving into the mystery of this jinx ship. Tod climbed into his bunk again with the feeling that he had let something infinitely precious slip through his fingers.

When the iron door closed behind the two men, Toppy crawled from his bunk with a relieved sigh. "That's the larst we'll ever see o' that bloke Frenchie. 'E's a goner, 'e is."

"You're a little bit cracked, Toppy," Bruce said, as he

winked across at Tod. "Probably a petty thief was trying to steal Gallardo's money."

Toppy struck a light. "You wait. I wouldn't be in that bloke's place fer a thousan'."

"Well, tomorrow we go below," Tod said at length to Bruce; "and that means work. We'd better turn in." He pulled the light-curtain on its piece of string, opened the porthole near at hand, and almost immediately dropped into sleep.

It seemed to Tod only a few minutes later when he was awakened by someone shaking his arm. He rubbed his eyes and sat up. The green night bulb burned dimly in the forecabin.

"Joe Macaroni, wake up!" It was Toppy. "Go up ter the 'ospital cabin and call French Louie, will yer? It's nearly four o'clock."

"What?" Tod was now wide awake. "Hasn't he come back yet?"

Bruce glanced at him across the foot of his bunk. "This gentleman from London wanted me to call Frenchie. It's not my job. Let him do it."

"I got ter get ready ter go below, ain't I? An' all yer got ter do is sleep."

Tod jumped to the floor and began dressing. "All right, I'll go, Toppy. I'll be right back. I know where sick bay is."

A moment later, he slipped out the door to the deck. The fog had thickened. It was like a soft gray curtain that moved in the darkness with the ship. The deck, the sea, the sky, had vanished. Slowly he felt his way forward along the bulwarks to the superstructure. The dampness caressed his cheeks and beaded his lashes. Once, the whistle punctuated the stillness with its note of warning, but one could never tell that the ship moved. At the starboard alleyway he encountered a figure that was dimly visible in the misty light of a bulb. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Gallardo," he said.

"Yes. All night I watch that cabin. But he didn't stir once." Tod, following his glance, saw that the passenger's gaze was fixed upon the door of the mess man's cabin. So the man suspected the huge Negro!

"I'm going to call French Louie," Tod said quickly. "It's time for him to go below."

The upper deck was completely dark; only a faint light shone in the wheelhouse window, probably from the binnacle lamp. Tod passed the second mate's cabin and knocked softly upon the door marked Sick Bay.

No answer. He knocked again. Silence. Above him sounded the hiss of the ship's funnel, then another long blast of the whistle.

"Louie!" he called through the door. "Louie, it's almost four o'clock."

Silence. A wild desire to run swept over Tod. He pulled himself together with an effort and, looking up at the porthole near the door, saw that it was open. He put up his hand and felt a heavy curtain. He called through the port, "Louie—Louie!"

His voice seemed muffled by the mist. In terror he glanced around him. The quiet of the deck was undisturbed.

With sudden resolution, he grasped the brass knob of the door. It was locked. He turned again to the porthole and put up his hand. He knew that the switch to the electric light would be near the door. The heavy curtain brushed his arm as he reached within. His fingers encountered the switch. The light flashed on. Then, pulling back the curtain, he peered into the cabin.

His first impression was that French Louie lay asleep. The coal-passer was stretched upon the bed, fully clothed, with one arm outflung. The expression upon the still face gripped Tod. It was convulsed with terror; the eyes stared sightlessly at the deck head. Tod, dragging his glance downward, suddenly felt a ground swell of fear

pull at his limbs. Directly over the heart, the handle of a knife protruded from the man's body.

Tod stumbled back from the porthole. Swaying drunkenly, he staggered toward the companionway. He had only one thought: to get away from this evil deck. He flung himself down the steps, crossed to the second companionway, and swung down the rail. He found himself against the bulwarks, where the night pressed close about him. He was lost in a world of mist. Step by step, he felt his way along the rail. When his hand touched the door of the forecastle, he realized on the instant that he should have reported to the captain. Reported what? Surely this was not real—surely this was some mad nightmare.

It was Toppy's voice that pierced through his daze. "Gawd strike me bline! Wot yer found?"

The fireman gazed at him in amazement. Bruce jumped to the floor. "For God's sake, Moran, what's wrong?"

Tod leaned against the table. "French Louie," he gasped. "Dead—a knife in his heart."

A moment of stunned silence enveloped the forecastle.

Bruce grasped his arm. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I couldn't wake him. The door was locked. I reached in the port and turned on the light. He's lying on the bunk—dead."

"Here, pull yourself together. Did you tell the captain?"

Tod shook his head. He rose, abruptly aware that the first sharp horror had passed. "Let's get up to the bridge—quick."

"The poor, bloomin' bloke. Killed! Blarst 'is 'ide who done it."

"Aw, shut up," said Panama Pete. "Come on."

The little group of firemen hurried forward. At the alleyway, they met the cabin passenger. His eyes widened with horror when he heard Tod's story. "It can't be

true," he remonstrated. "I watched the mess man's cabin, and he never stirred."

Tod was surprised to see the light still streaming from the porthole of the sick bay. "Captain—Captain!" called a voice.

A step came running from the bridge. "What's wrong?"

Even in the dense fog, Tod could see that Captain Barry's face was prepared for any eventuality. Tod told him.

Without a word, the master of the *Congo* took a pass-key from his pocket and fitted it into the cabin door. As it flew backward, the little group surged into the room. Tod, entering just behind the captain, uttered a cry of terror and dismay.

The bunk was empty. The body had disappeared.

TOD DEFIES THE JINX

SPEECHLESS, THE MEN STARED AT THE EMPTY BUNK. TOPPY, PEERING OVER Tod's shoulder, broke in upon that moment of stunned surprise. "Blimey, 'e's gone! I knew it—I knew it!"

Captain Barry turned upon him. "Pipe down, you birds! If this boy told the truth, the man's body must be here. Search the cabin!"

Tod stumbled out to deck. Search? Of what use was that? Couldn't they see that the body was gone! There was no possible hiding place—unless overboard. Standing there on the open deck, with the mist hazing past, Tod suddenly remembered his encounter with the Negro mess man earlier that night. With the certainty that this ghastly murder in the hospital cabin relieved him of his former promise, he at once swung about. "Captain Barry," he called. "I think there's someone hiding in the starboard lifeboat."

The master of the *Congo* scattered the men with a commanding gesture. "Search the ship, you lubbers! Young man, open up that lifeboat!"

Tod took the electric torch that Señor Gallardo offered him, and immediately crossed to the lifeboat. Bruce followed at his heels. Together they hurriedly unlashed the ropes of the boat cover. Tod trembled. An obscure dread was beating at the wall of his consciousness. What would they find—what would they find? With his heart pounding in his throat, he lifted the canvas and flashed the light within.

"It's empty!" Bruce cried.

Incredulous, Tod examined the interior. "Nothing here, sir," he at length acknowledged.

"Empty—empty!" roared the captain. "Every lubber on this ship is going crazy. Scatter, you men! Find that stokehole rat."

Tod glanced at Bruce and saw that the youth's face was pale as death. Tod swung on his heel. Swiftly over him stole the certainty that, no matter how long the men searched, French Louie would never be found. Like a phantom he had vanished from the ship, and like a phantom the sea had claimed him.

The men aboard the *Congo* slept no more that night, for at three bells disaster once more brushed against them.

Tod lay in his bunk waiting for the gray dawn to appear. His mind was mulling over the problem on the boat deck. Someone had killed French Louie and then thrown his body overboard. Who was it? Where had the murderer been hiding when he, Tod Moran, had switched on the cabin light and seen the body stretched on the bunk? What was the meaning of all these strange occurrences aboard the old tramp? Tod clenched his fists; a sharp feeling of anger surged up within him. He would delve into this mystery, he vowed, until he found the answer.

He heard Bruce Harvey stir in the bunk next to him. "Asleep, Moran?"

"No," Tod replied; "I've been wondering what it all means." He was glad to hear Bruce Harvey's voice, even though he disliked the older youth's insolent and superior attitude.

"Listen, old chap," Bruce went on in a low tone; "I want to apologize. This murder of French Louie has shown me that there's something back of this jinx story. Of course, you and I don't really believe this superstitious rot!"

"No, sure we don't," Tod echoed.

Bruce nodded; his brown eyes gleamed with sudden

feeling. "The *Congo* isn't a jinx—she can't be! If she had first-class officers and a good crew, she'd be a fine ship."

"You bet she would," Tod affirmed. He stretched out his hand in a friendly gesture. "Let's work this out together."

A smile of delight spread over Bruce Harvey's face. "Put it there, Tod. We'll find out what's wrong. The *Congo* is a good ship—" He caught his breath sharply. "Good heavens! what's that?"

Tod's heart sank. A tide of fear threatened to rise in a wave and overwhelm him. He pressed a clammy hand against the steel bulkhead. A long shudder went through the *Congo*. She rolled to starboard, then pitched heavily. Shouts came from the fore deck. Bells clanged in the engine room.

"Quick!" Bruce gasped. "Let's get above!"

They jumped to the floor, rushed up the steps, and hurried along the slippery deck. Beneath the misty light of the port alleyway, they met Toppy, who was coming from the fiddley ladder.

"What's happened?" Tod cried.

"We 'it somethin'," the little cockney announced gloomily, as he wiped his naked torso with a sweat rag. "Don't arsk me wot. Just started ter come on deck fer a blow when we 'its. Maybe a fishin' smack. Poor blokes!" He crossed to the bulwarks and gazed overside. "Wot next, I arsk—wot next!"

From the deck above came the crisp voice of Captain Barry. "We ran over a derelict, I think, chief," he called out to Mr. McMurtrie, who was hurrying aft. "Nothing serious. Are ye all right below?"

"All O. K. down below, Cap'n," answered the chief engineer; "but I want to look over the screw and the steering gear."

"Good. Half speed ahead!" sang out the master.

Tod Moran crossed to the bulwarks, where he gazed out into the gray obscurity. Had the derelict, that

dreaded danger of the sea, already slipped astern of them? These half-submerged wrecks, he knew, often floated across the paths of ocean vessels, leaving death and disaster in their wake. Was it drifting with the current, perhaps toward an unsuspecting liner?

His hand moved along the rail. The impression seized him that he stood on a phantom ship, sailing a phantom sea. Only the two vague figures of Toppy and Bruce gave him a sense of reality.

The little cockney reached out and touched Tod's arm. "Joe Macaroni," he said urgently, "don't you two young 'uns go foolin' round this blarsted ship. Keep ter the fo'c'sle. Frenchie got curious—and see wot 'appened ter 'im. Next, it'll be you. Keep quiet, you twol"

Tod, turning to look at Bruce, saw that the youth had fixed him with a friendly glance of understanding. In his eyes Tod saw reflected the urge that welled up within himself. Keep quiet? No—no! They'd see this thing through together.

He raised his head defiantly. With a look of grim determination, he surveyed the dim outlines of the ship's superstructure. As though accepting this challenge of defiance, the *Congo*, from aloft, sent out a long, menacing blast of her whistle. For a moment, it shattered the stillness as abruptly as a trumpet call to battle, eager, exultant; then silence once more closed down about those baneful decks.

Tod inwardly trembled. All those dread forebodings of the Black Gang swept over him and flooded his mind with terror. It was not the officers aboard this ship, it was the sinister personality of the *Congo* herself that they must fight.

The soft notes of the bell sounded on the bridge: one, two—three, four! The ship steamed on in silence through the fog.

PART TWO

THE HURRICANE

Havana Harbour
Foreign and Offshore Vessels in Port
Arrived 2 July Am. Stmr. Congo, Barry—6
days from New York Mdse. to Gomez & Co.
La Lucha

• • •

CHAPTER I

BELOW DECK

AT DAWN THE FOG LIFTED. TOD MORAN, COMING ON DECK AT SIX BELLS, found the *Congo* steaming south across a glittering expanse of water that stretched away on all sides to a blue horizon. In the tranquil loveliness of the morning, the only sounds were the musical slap of waves along the hull and the soft cries of the gulls as they circled overhead. The ship seemed caught in an enchantment, with the fantastic events of the night lost astern in the foaming wake.

It was a silent breakfast in the mess room. The few remarks that passed across the table regarding the disappearance of French Louie's body were brief and guarded. Several seamen cast doubtful glances at Tod; his story, he realized with a sense of bitterness, was not believed by everyone present.

One bell soon sounded in the engine room. "Ten

minutes to eight," a quartermaster informed the two wipers. "You birds report below to the storekeeper. He's a husky little brute from Chile."

Tod entered the engine room entrance with Bruce at his heels. At once they were enveloped in the loud vibrations of the engines. A hot breath of air swept by them up toward the open skylights. They passed along the first grating and swung down the steel rail of the ladder to the second platform. Here the noise increased to a high crescendo. Glancing downward, Tod saw the shining cylinder heads and, below them, flashing metal rods. At his station between the telegraph dial and the gauges stood the second engineer. Tod turned to the left and stepped over a high casing into the storeroom.

The chief engineer was bending over the lathe. Opposite him a shrill screech came from the emery wheel where the storekeeper sharpened a chisel. He looked up with a solemn smile upon his dark countenance. "You two boys wipers—no?" he greeted. "I show you work."

He surveyed with a practised eye the two new members of the Black Gang. Tod wore a white singlet and a pair of black dungarees which he had obtained from the steward's slop chest. Bruce's well-built frame was clad in a blue shirt with uprolled sleeves and a pair of tan corduroy trousers which still held creases. Bruce gazed about the small steel-walled room with mounting interest. His keen eyes sparkled.

The storekeeper's glance, sweeping over Tod, quickly fastened upon Bruce. "Say, what for you wear gloves? You work here—no?"

Bruce immediately stripped off the white canvas gloves. He smiled at his companion. "Can't I get away with anything on this tub?"

They were given their orders for the morning's work. First the storekeeper passed Tod a bucket of kerosene and a rag. He was started at his work of wiping down the gratings, beginning at the engine-room entrance just

within the starboard alleyway. Bruce followed him, wiping the plates dry and shining.

"This isn't bad," the latter remarked, "if we don't fall off this iron trapeze."

Tod nodded. As the ship rolled gently, they clutched the steel rail to keep from falling to the plates of the floor sixty feet below. Slowly they worked their way downward, shining the grating and rails; then, with the throb of the engines loud in their ears, they wiped the oil and dirt from the steel plates of the flooring. From the stokehole came the clang of furnace doors. An oiler went by on his half-hour rounds. The chief engineer passed them without a glance on his tour of inspection.

"Yes, he's right," Bruce whispered as, on his knees, he wiped the kerosene from the floor, "we're less than the dust, old top. He didn't even notice us."

Tod smiled grimly. His back was beginning to ache; sweat rolled from his face; his mouth felt dry and parched. Wearily he crawled round the hot oil tanks. In his nostrils the smell of the bilge grew more intense, more nauseating.

"This is lowly work, but honest," Bruce managed to chuckle. "Here comes Chili con Carne. As Toppy says, 'Wot next, I arks, wot next?'"

The storekeeper swung down the ladder from the ice-machine room. "You wash the walls now," he said huskily. "Make 'em white."

"White!" Bruce uttered in surprise. "Why these walls are black."

The Chilean shrugged. "White once. Dirty now. You wash them with soogey water, then they white."

Tod looked up at the gray-black walls which stretched up to the open skylight high above. He sighed. That job would be endless.

They brought long timbers from the shaft tunnel and carried them up to the grating beneath the skylight. With ropes, they slung the boards across the space which

seemed like a dark abyss. The rising heat, the smell of oil and bilge, the rhythmic hum of the engines, all made Tod think of a rumbling volcano yawning beneath them. Standing on a narrow timber with a bucket of hot water swinging in his hand, he was at once struck by the height of their position. A misstep or a sudden lurch of the ship might well mean death to them.

"Now soogey the walls," ordered the storekeeper from the grating below. "You be finished by the time we hit Havana—maybe."

Tod dropped a piece of cotton waste into the soapy water and wrung it partly dry, then he rubbed the steel bulkhead around the rivets of the skylight. By slow degrees the black changed to gray, the gray to white.

Bruce stood up as he washed the glass of the skylight. "This is great stuff," he grinned. "Who said I wasn't a sailor!"

Tod smiled. As they worked, the heat and fumes ascended in quivering waves. The morning sun, slanting through the glass, added to their misery. Tod raised a weary hand to his forehead which dripped with sweat. By golly, it was hot!

Bruce, too, soon languished. As the ship plunged sluggishly and then rolled to port, he grasped the rope for support. Weakly he sat down on the timber, his legs hanging over the void. "Gosh, I'm feeling all in, old thing," he said with a wry smile.

"Take a rest," Tod urged. "We don't have to kill ourselves."

Bruce's blue shirt was dark with sweat; beads of perspiration ran down his firm jaw in trickles. His face was pale and drawn. Tod, stopping his soogey work for a moment to glance his way, saw with alarm that his companion was sick.

"Feel low?" he asked.

"Like a dish rag."

"Here, you'd better get on deck for a while."

Bruce nodded, and began climbing weakly down the timbers to the first grating.

"Say, where you go?"

At the sound of the storekeeper's voice, Tod looked down. The little Chilean, standing directly below them on a ladder, turned a wrathful countenance up at Bruce Harvey. "You go back to work!"

"I feel rather sick," Bruce called out. "I'm going on deck for a few minutes."

"Seeck!" the storekeeper shouted scornfully. "If you seeck, you stay and work it off. Get back!"

Bruce glanced downward with a scowl. "Say, be yourself, Chili con Carne; if I'm sick I don't work, understand? I'm going on deck."

The storekeeper's voice rose to a scream that shrilled out above the rhythmic throb of the engines. Tod, watching the scene below him, suddenly observed the chief engineer emerge from the storeroom and climb the ladder. Beneath his white-topped cap, the man's gray eyes gleamed angrily. "Listen here, you wipers," he commanded, "you do what the storekeeper tells you. He has his orders from me, and I've told him to see that you soogey that paint. Now, get back to work."

For a moment Bruce stood uncertainly on the grating. His eyes swept toward the alleyway door as though seeking escape. His face was drawn in agony.

"If you're sick, you'll get over it quicker by work," went on the chief in a gruff tone. "Get back at once! You're not home with Mamma now."

Bruce kindled with rage. Tod saw him level a keen glance of scorn at the chief engineer; then he turned without a word, and slowly drew himself up to the timber again. The two men below vanished into the storeroom.

Tod shot a glance at Bruce. He saw the youth sway unsteadily against the bulkhead, saw his eyes close in agony, and his hands clutch the rope for support. In a

horrified instant, Tod realized that his companion was about to fall from the narrow plank, past the steel gratings, past the cylinder heads, to the engine-room floor sixty feet below. In a flash Tod rose. Darting along the plank toward the swaying form, he gripped the edge of the open skylight with one hand; the other he threw about his companion's shoulder.

"Here, steady yourself," he counselled. "Hold tight. You'll feel better in a moment."

The ship gave a sluggish roll to port. The timbers beneath them swung imperceptibly in the air. "I'm all right," Bruce said in a weak voice. "Let me sit down."

Tod knew that the storekeeper or the chief might reappear at any moment. "We've got to keep busy," he whispered. "Let me tie you on."

Unwillingly Bruce allowed Tod to slip a rope about his waist and then tie it securely to a crossbeam of the skylight.

"You won't fall, anyway," Tod said at last as he went back to his own bucket. He picked up his piece of waste and, dipping it into the water, began rubbing the paint again.

The moments slowly passed. The white spot before Tod's eyes grew wider. He noticed, however, that the spot before Bruce remained almost stationary. At length he crawled along the plank, "I'll work here, too," he announced.

Bruce gave him a friendly glance of understanding. "I'm feeling better," he acknowledged. "Let me move this bucket."

He picked up the bucket of soapy water just at the moment when the ship plunged gently in a swell. Tod was not wholly surprised to see it slip from his weak grasp and overturn. Though he still held the handle, the contents sprayed downward like a white waterfall.

A cry of rage from below made Tod's heart stand still. Looking downward, he saw the chief engineer snarling

in fury as he wiped the soogey water from his cap and shoulders.

"Sufferin' tripe, the chief got it all!" Tod whispered in awe.

"I think the jinx is working," Bruce replied nervously. "Watch him rave now. Serves him right."

The chief engineer stepped back with an oath. He lifted a furious face to the boys. "Damn you lubbers! You did that on purpose." He swung back his arm, and Tod, in a startled moment, perceived that the man held a wrench in his hand. With a quick movement he hurled it upward, straight at them.

The boys ducked. The wrench whizzed by and went flying out the open skylight. Tod heard it thud as it struck a lifeboat outside. From the chief's lips a stream of oaths continued flowing; then, at length the man turned and swung up the ladder to the starboard alleyway.

"That was a narrow escape," Bruce admitted with a grin. "Now, how can a lubber be seasick when things like that happen! I feel better, much better."

Tod's ears had caught sounds of a commotion on the boat deck. He stood up and, raising himself to the open skylight, looked out. The sunshine beat warmly down on the deck and the sea beyond. Near the port lifeboat stood the second mate and a seaman who had evidently been washing down the deck.

"Knocked the paint off the lifeboat," Mr. Sharp was shrilling in a voice ludicrously high and thin. "Who threw that wrench?"

He turned and noticed Tod peering from the skylight. "You did that?" he scowled.

"No, sir," Tod answered.

The second mate crossed to the boy. "Who was it, then?"

Tod did not answer, for another sound rose and fell on the still morning air, a sound that made his hair softly

stir. It was a moan, faint and distant, yet it seemed to come directly from the port lifeboat. Tod saw a look of intense surprise spread over Mr. Sharp's thin face. He spun about. "What's in that boat?" he snapped. "Open it up at once!"

Tod trembled. Were they about to find the murderer? Had the mess man's friend slipped from the starboard to the port lifeboat? Had he been aroused by the sudden thud of the wrench near him? Tod observed the old seaman drop the hose with its brass nozzle and quickly unleash the rope of the tarpaulin covering the boat. Wide-eyed, Tod gazed at the scene.

The seaman threw back the cover. With an exclamation of astonishment, he gazed within. He motioned to the second mate, who approached the boat with a swaying stride. Tod saw the man peer into the interior. "Take him out," he ordered at last in a strange tone.

The seaman stretched his arm into the boat. Instantly he recoiled, with an upward movement of his arms. From his lips came a cry of fear. A small dark form jumped from the interior straight past the man, and settled upon Mr. Sharp's left shoulder. Tod started. It was a cat, with back arched, its black fur shining in the sunlight. It was a large, scrawny beast with glistening yellow eyes. Its tail lashed the air as it looked about the deck.

"Take it off—take it off," shrilled Mr. Sharp. The seaman was evidently too amazed by this sudden apparition to stir. Mr. Sharp raised his hand, and the cat leaped lightly, quickly, to a cabin roof.

There it sat, looking down at the men—a strange black beast with uncanny eyes.

The second mate swore loudly. "Catch that thing! Throw him overboard!"

"I'm afraid we can't do that, sir."

"Can't? Why not?"

The seaman stirred uneasily. "Well, sir, lookit the critter! He's too wise. I'd never be able to catch him."

Mr. Sharp had recovered from his first fright. "I'll get him, don't worry." He approached the cat, calling softly.

But the black beast only arched its back and spat at him. The officer stopped short. "All right; we'll shoot him then. Ask Captain Barry for his automatic."

"Yes, sir."

When the seaman returned, Captain Barry followed him. "What's this, I hear, Mr. Sharp? A cat?"

"Yes, sir. A black devil—sitting there on the cabin."

The captain regarded the scrawny beast in surprise.

"You can't catch it, Mr. Sharp?"

"No, sir. I thought I'd better shoot it."

"Very well. Go ahead."

Shoot it! Tod quivered. Shoot the mess man's pet? No—no! Quickly he climbed through the skylight to deck.

"Don't—don't!" he cried in a vibrant voice. "Let me have him."

Both men swung about and faced him. "Oh, he's yours, is he?" accused the second mate. "So it's you who hid the beast in the lifeboat!"

Tod shook his head.

The second mate raised his right arm. The pistol was clenched in his hand. "Well, yours or not, he'll be a dead cat in one minute."

A shot rang out. Mr. Sharp swore. "Where'd he go?"

Captain Barry stared in amazement. "He jumped to the deck below, I think. Find him."

The seaman came from around the cabin. "I don't see him, sir. He must have been swept overboard."

"Good!" said the captain. "That's the end of him."

Tod almost smiled as he dropped through the skylight to a seat on the plank. At the end opposite Bruce sat the cat. "The little imp," Bruce grinned.

The cat purred, contentedly licking its paw. Tod reached down and stroked its head. The yellow eyes looked into his. Suddenly the beast leaped to the grat-

ing below. There he paused, as Toppo slowly climbed from the stokehole.

Almost at the top of the ladder, Toppo hesitated. He raised his eyes and saw the cat staring at him.

"Gawd strike me pink!" He staggered backward. The cat jumped for the alleyway and disappeared.

"What's the matter?" Bruce called.

Toppo turned his eyes upward. "What was that?" he asked huskily. "A black cat?"

"No, you silly blighter. What are you talking about?"

"I dunno. I guess I'm seein' things." He shook his head in perplexity and climbed to the upper grating, where he stopped and asked: "Are you sure I didn't see no bloomin' cat?"

"Certainly not! You must have imagined it."

Toppo scratched his tawny hair. "The blarsted jinx is workin' again! Lor', wot next—wot next!"

CHAPTER II

WHO IS GUILTY?

"I'VE TOLD YE MEN TO COME HERE," BEGAN CAPTAIN BARRY, A HALF HOUR later, "to look into this French Louie affair."

Tod Moran moved uneasily in his seat on the settee. He glanced at the captain, who sat at the table in the centre of the cabin. The man's eyes, he observed closely, were intent and as hard as steel; his fat, hairy hands rested on the green baize of the table. Near him sat the second mate, his officer's cap pushed back on his light brown hair. In a chair at one side reclined Señor Gallardo, slim and dark and immaculately dressed. On the settee directly beneath the portholes and next to Tod, sat the Negro mess man. About them all hung an uncomfortable feeling of suspense.

"I gotta make a report to the proper authorities," resumed the captain in his harsh, deep tones. "I want to hear just what happened last night. First I want to know why this coal-passer, French Louie, was sleeping in the sick bay?" Captain Barry paused and gazed savagely in the direction of Señor Gallardo. "What was he there for, I say? . . . Mr. Gallardo, I'll call ye as first witness."

Tod, with mounting interest, watched the cabin passenger cross to the empty chair opposite the captain. Seating himself, the man flashed a quick glance across the table; his black eyes narrowed. "You want me to tell everything?" he asked in a suave voice.

"Everything," snapped the captain as he leaned forward across the table. "In the first place, I took ye as a cabin passenger aboard this freighter against my wishes. Ye said ye could get to San Felipe in no other way. I knew that ships seldom put in there, so I let ye come

and gave ye the sick bay as a cabin. Why, Mr. Gallardo, do ye wish to go to this God-forsaken island?"

Señor Gallardo raised his dark eyes. "That, Captain, might be my own private affair, no?"

Captain Barry stroked his beard with a nervous hand. "Ye refuse to tell?"

"The reason is not important, my dear Captain. I paid you well, and in return you were so very kind to let me come. That is all. The reason for my visit has nothing to do with this—this murder."

"Ah!" The captain nodded slowly. "The reason, Mr. Gallardo, might have a lot to do with this murder. But ye refuse. Very well; go on. I'll put that point down against ye."

With a flash of his white teeth, Señor Gallardo smiled. "The important thing is, Captain, that someone has been trying to get into my cabin. Twice, the first night out from New York, someone tried to open my door, then a hand reached in the open porthole."

"How do ye know? The cabin was dark, wasn't it?"

"It was; but I heard the curtain before the porthole move ever so little on its wire. I jumped up and looked out. It was too foggy to see anything. I said nothing to you because I wasn't at all sure. Last night, however, I again heard this prowler. I had an idea who it might be." He paused and his dark eyes swept across to the mess man.

Captain Barry nodded slowly. "Ye thought ye knew who it was! Why?"

"There are people, Captain, who would not have me return to San Felipe. The Negro mess, I knew, was a native of the island."

Tod saw the captain throw back his head in surprise. "Ye mean Black Jean?" His glance, hard and cold, crossed to the mess man. "Is this true?" he demanded.

The mess man stared unseeingly at the floor. Tod was aware that there was an undercurrent of intensity here

which he did not understand. What if the mess were a native of San Felipe? What connection did that have with Señor Gallardo and the *Congo*? His thoughts were interrupted by the captain again crying: "Answer! Are ye a native of San Felipe?"

"Yes, sah," the Negro at length uttered. "Yes, sah, but Ah ain't been there fo' five years. Ah been in New York, sah, workin'. And befo' that, Ah lived in Mobile. Ah was a stevedoh. Hones' to Gawd, sah, Ah dunno nothin' about French Louie."

Captain Barry leaned back in his swivel chair. Tod received the impression that the man was somehow relieved at the reply. "Very well. We are getting down to brass tacks now. Go on, Gallardo."

"I suspected the Negro, Captain, because of reasons which I may tell you later. But I wasn't certain, of course. So I went back to the firemen's forecabin and asked the men if one of them would keep watch with me. I promised good pay, and French Louie accepted. I showed him to the sick bay; then I descended to the after deck. The starboard alleyway was only dimly lighted; but I knew the mess's cabin. By looking in the open port, I saw the Negro apparently asleep. All night I watched his door from the darkness where I sat on number three hatch. The man never left his cabin once!"

Tod heard a sigh escape the Negro's lips. The captain leaned across the table. "You are sure, Gallardo, that the mess never left?"

"I'm certain. I suspected him, but he's not the guilty person." He said the words as though he almost regretted the necessity of freeing the mess man of suspicion.

"Did you notice anyone else go above? Did you see anything at all suspicious?"

The witness moved back in his chair. "There was a dense fog, as you know, Captain. But I did see someone slip forward and climb the companionway to the boat deck. He had come from aft, probably from the fire-

men's forecastle, and I remembered that I wondered at the time what he was doing up there."

"Yes," said the captain, leaning closer, "and did ye git a good look at this fellow? Did ye recognize him?"

"I did. When he returned almost twenty minutes later, I watched him slip down and go past the alleyway light. He was not a grown man, Captain, he was little more than a boy. I recalled that I had seen him earlier in the evening in the firemen's forecastle."

A sigh of satisfaction escaped the captain's lips. "How were ye certain?"

"He returned some time later. There was no mistaking the height and build of him."

Captain Barry lowered his voice. "And is this fellow present?"

Señor Gallardo, turning his dark head, gazed full at Tod. The boy felt his pulse beat more quickly. The sudden realization swept over him that the cabin passenger meant him. Was this a story the man had concocted, or did he really believe it?

Gallardo pointed an accusing finger at Tod. "That's the boy!"

Tod felt a cold perspiration break out over him. His breath came fast; his hands trembled. "It's a lie," he cried, "a lie!"

"That will do!" ordered the captain. "Thank ye, Mr. Gallardo. We'll call the next witness. Tod Moran, step forward!"

Tod rose in a daze. Trembling, he crossed to the witness chair, and trembling, dropped into it. With his hands gripping the arms of the chair, he raised a white face to the captain.

"Things look rather bad for ye, Moran," went on Captain Barry in his deep tone. "Tell us what ye know. First, what was ye really doing on the boat deck when the second mate and me discovered ye?"

Tod gulped. "That was earlier in the evening," he be-

gan. "Hours before Señor Gallardo was standing watch. I was sitting on the hatch about ten o'clock when I heard a noise. It came from the deck above. I wondered what it was. I heard the men in the fo'c'sle talking about the jinx; and I thought somebody was playing a trick on them. I climbed to the boat deck, but before I could open the port lifeboat, where the noise came from, somebody grabbed my arm. It was the mess man. He told me not to unloosen the tarpaulin. He said he had a friend in the boat, a stowaway. Of course, it was only his cat; but I thought sure it was a man."

The captain drummed with a short hairy finger upon the green baize. "Yes? And then?"

"Then you came. I didn't want to tell; so I said I'd been fixing the ventilators. That was all." Tod paused and wiped his brow. The men, he knew, were hanging on to his every word. Did they believe him?

"Ye went above again, later?"

"Not until eight bells, time to call the men. Toppy asked me to call French Louie. I knocked, but he didn't answer. Then I called. I got scared then; but I wasn't sure anything was wrong; so I reached in the open port and turned on the electric switch." Tod stopped. He pressed the back of his hand against his eyes as though to wipe that vision from his memory. "Then—then I saw him. Dead."

Not a movement came from the men. Tod heard the soft whine of wind in the rigging and the step of an officer on the bridge above.

Suddenly he raised his head. "That's all, sir. I didn't know what to do for a minute, until I found myself back in the fo'c'sle. Then we reported to you."

The captain nodded. "And yet we found the cabin empty. No clue, no knife, nothing to show that a murder had been committed. The door, too, was locked." He leaned across the table and suddenly shot a question at the boy. "Do ye still think ye saw a knife?"

"Yes, sir. I've told you the truth."

The captain turned his gaze out the porthole. "Black Jean is guilty of stowing a cat aboard without permission. But the beast is dead now, so I'll drop that. As for this murder, as ye call it, so far we ain't got no evidence but yer word—and I don't think much o' that. If there really was a murder, I don't think a boy of your age would do it." He glanced at Tod as though conferring upon him the benefit of the doubt. "No—I don't think ye are guilty. But, look here, we've got no proof that the man was even murdered. For some reason of his own, he might have jumped overboard." He ceased speaking for a moment and, unbuttoning his blue coat, flung it open. "Ain't that the truth?"

Tod looked up in surprise. Until this very moment, the thought had never entered his mind that the officers and men might not believe his story of the finding of French Louie's body. Not believe that? No—no! Didn't they realize that a murderer was at large among them? Tod's hands clenched; his fingers dug into his palm. Even though it freed him, he quivered as though struck by a whip when he heard the captain's verdict.

"All this murder stuff sounds like bilge to me," calmly announced Captain Barry. "Yes—bilge! So I'm goin' to call it suicide."

SECRET ACTION

AT FIVE O'CLOCK THAT AFTERNOON, THE WIPERS CLIMBED WITH LAGGARD steps from the engine room. Tired, dirty, with sweat running from their bodies, they stood a moment on the after deck and silently gazed at each other.

"Sufferin' sea gulls, it's quiet here," Tod remarked. "We'll be missing the sounds of the engines tonight."

Bruce leaned on the bulwarks, breathing in deeply the fresh cool air. "I feel as though I had been in a Turkish bath for eight hours," he replied. "Weak as a baby. All I want is my bunk."

"We've just time for a shower before supper," Tod returned. "Hurry up."

"Me hurry?" Bruce smiled. "Righto, old chap. Come on."

Tod had started to follow aft when the mess man approached. Upon his ebony face was an anxious expression. "You see Maximilian, boy?"

Tod paused. "Who do you mean?"

"My cat. You see him killed?"

"No, the second mate didn't shoot him. He's on the ship."

The mess man's white teeth flashed in a wide grin. "If yo' see him, boy, yo' tell me. Then I give yo' a good-luck sign."

Tod smiled through his weariness. There it was again—the sign. "All right, mess. I guess I need it, too. Thanks."

In the washroom Bruce awaited him. "Tod, my clothes are gone," he announced.

"What clothes?"

"My washing. I was too blamed tired last night to wash my duds, so I left them soaking here in a bucket."

"By thunder, you're in for it," Tod confessed. "Aren't you enough of a sailorman to know the skipper doesn't allow any clothes left here? If he inspected this morning and found your bucket full of duds—well, you'll hear from him."

"We can't be worried about a little thing like that," Bruce returned. "Say, this steam pipe is hot!"

As he and Bruce scrubbed the grime of the engine room from their bodies, Tod felt his spirits revive. What had happened, he wondered, to the mess man's cat? Where was the creature hiding? "I hope Black Jean finds the little beggar," he remarked. "Maximilian—what a name for a cat!"

Bruce smiled as he rubbed himself into a healthy glow. "He's probably hiding Max in his cabin. But there are more uncanny things aboard this ship than that cat."

Tod, scrubbing the grease and soap from his head, mumbled a reply with closed eyes. "This voyage is going to be worse than I thought. I can't understand what's doing."

"Tod, do you know what I think? Well, I think someone is hiding aboard this ship. Maybe the officers know it and maybe they don't. But I'm sure the mess man's cat isn't the only stowaway. Whoever it is has struck once—he'll strike again."

Tod, careless of the soap, opened his eyes with a sharp glance. "You mean that the killing of French Louie was a mistake?"

"Of course it was. This fellow meant to get Gallardo. And believe me, old top, before Gallardo ever reaches San Felipe, there'll be another attempt upon his life!" Bruce paused as he hung up the towel on the line to dry. "We've got a queer crew here and a queerer bunch of officers. The captain and the second mate have been on the *Congo* for three years. The other officers are all new,

and the crew, of course, change every trip. Now, the second officer, Mr. Sharp, has had several chances to get the first mate's job; but he never takes it. Why?"

"How do you know all this?" Tod rejoined.

Bruce's glance wavered. "Oh, I've been talking to the men every chance I get. They learn things."

"And what do they say about the captain's verdict of suicide?"

"Well, when I took a bucket of ice water down to the stokers awhile ago, they seemed to agree with him. They're not too ready to believe your story."

"Oh, they aren't," Tod bristled. "And what do you think?"

"Me? Well, I feel certain that the captain has a reason. He may have a pretty good idea who the guilty person is, and he's merely waiting to spring a trap."

Tod laughed softly. "That's not my idea at all. Do you know what I think?" He lowered his voice. "It was the skipper himself! He's the guilty person. Oh, I know I sound crazy; but I got the feeling there this afternoon that the whole inquiry was faked. He simply wants to throw the crew off the right track. That's why he lets on that he doesn't believe my story. He and Gallardo both know I told the truth."

"And Gallardo? What do you think of him?"

"I don't know. But there's so much going on aboard this ship that I can't understand," Tod confessed. "This is a mighty queer ship, anyway, if you ask me. Last year, I went through the Panama Canal on the *Araby*, and I liked her. But this old freighter is different. There's something about the *Congo* that's not straight. I can't tell why; but I don't like this tramp."

"Oh, this old tub's all right; it's not the ship so much as the men who run her. They're the ones behind this jinx business. For several years this old freighter has had unlucky voyages; she never pays her owners. And

I'd like to know the reason why.—Here comes Chili con Carne. What's he want us to do now?"

Tod looked up and met the solemn gaze of the storekeeper. "One of you wipers leave washing in bucket here today?" he asked. "The Old Man tell me if he find any more clothes here, he put you boys down in the bilge."

"Oh, he did?" Bruce bristled. "Well, they're mine. Where are they?"

"Overboard," replied the storekeeper with a broad grin. "The Old Man threw them overside. Maybe the sharks has got 'em now. There's one following us." The storekeeper turned and left them.

"Can you beat that?" Bruce smiled at Tod. "Listen a second! There goes the mess bell." He darted out the door and made for his clothes in the forecabin.

Later, as they filed out of the mess room, Tod heard Topsy calling him. He turned in the narrow alleyway and saw the little fireman's head protruding from the stokehole fiddley.

"I wants ter talk with yer, Joe Macaroni." Topsy stood on the fiddley ladder. As Tod approached him, he lowered his voice. "Say, I been hearin' dawn below wot the Spanish guy said about yer. Did he tell the Old Man that yer'd been on the boat deck about two o'clock last night?"

Tod nodded, wondering what Topsy was getting at.

"H—m!" The little cockney solemnly surveyed him for a moment. "Well, Joe Macaroni, I think I know who it was."

"You do?"

"Yeah." Topsy slowly took a grimy sweat rag from his belt and wiped his shining chest. "About four bells o' the middle watch I woke up. I saw yer college friend climb down from 'is bunk. 'E looks aroun' ter see if we was all asleep. I never moved. Then 'e pulls on his pants and goes on deck. 'E comes back in about twenty minutes. Now this Gallardo said 'e couldn't see because o' the

fog, didn't 'e? But 'e knew it was a young 'un who passed 'im. Strike me bline if 'e wasn't right! Only it was the college boy, not you."

"Bruce? Aw, you're wrong, Toppo. I told him everything that happened at the inquiry today, and he never mentioned going on deck. No; you're wrong."

"Blast yer 'ide, Joe Macaroni, I ain't wrong!" Toppo looked quickly into the deserted alleyway, spat viciously down the fiddley ladder, and turned again to Tod with his little sharp face screwed into a frown. "I gotta get back ter the furnace now; but I wanted ter warn yer not to be too friendly with that young swell. College boy, me eye! The bloomin' bloke don't know nothin'. 'E ain't playin' straight with yer, Joe Macaroni. 'E's up ter somethin'." Toppo waved a grimy hand. "See yer later." He disappeared downward into the darkness of the narrow fiddley. Tod stood for a moment immovable, as he listened to the thud of Toppo's shoes on the iron rungs of the ladder.

Tod was pondering. Was Toppo correct in his surmise? Impossible! Surely, as a friend, Bruce would have taken him into his confidence if he had gone above to the boat deck the night before. Toppo was simply imagining things. He didn't like Bruce. None of the men did. For Tod was aware that, as soon as the crew learned that Bruce had been to college, they had treated him as a social outcast.

With a vague feeling of perturbation, nevertheless, Tod slowly made his way aft to his quarters. A blue fog of cheap tobacco smoke enveloped the forecastle, where the men off watch were playing cards at the table in the centre. As he went down the three steps, Bruce motioned from his bunk.

"Say, Tod, before I suffocate in here, let's go out. What do you say to sleeping on deck tonight?"

"Didn't you sleep all right last night?" Tod inquired. After he had said the words, he wished that he could re-

call them. He trusted Bruce, trusted him implicitly, and he didn't want to be doubting his friend.

When he heard Bruce's reply, he was doubly sorry. "Oh, I slept like a log last night; never stirred once. But we're getting farther south now, and it's getting warmer. Let's sleep above."

Tod acquiesced. With a dull pain throbbing in his heart he carried the narrow mattress and blankets to deck, climbed the short ladder to the poop above, and spread his bed near the forecastle skylight. He hardly glanced at his companion.

Bruce evidently did not notice his depression. He gaily talked of his life ashore, of his home and schooling. The two boys slipped into their beds, thankful for the rest, while the twilight about them deepened into night.

Bruce lay on one arm, looking astern. The white wake dropped behind them on a calm sea that spread out unbroken to the horizon. Abruptly he pointed toward the churning water. "Look, Tod. Chili con Carne was right. There's a shark following us."

"Aw, we're going too fast for a shark to keep up with us."

"Fast! In this tramp? Don't make me laugh, old dear. What's that out there to starboard, then?"

Tod turned his gaze astern. His eyes widened. Directly to one side of the gleaming wake trailed a long sinister body. He vaguely made out the black dorsal fin cutting the water with a knife-like thrust. Bruce lowered his voice. "We ought to call Toppy. He'd probably say the brute was waiting for one of us. Maybe that's the jinx."

Tod made no reply. He let his gaze sweep to port where a small coasting steamer was passing; its lights winked through the night. The stars came out, cold and distant. A freshening breeze sang through the rigging above them. Their talk dwindled; the boy dozed. The regular throb of the engines and the soft vibration of the deck beneath him kept him from slipping into profound slumber. He

heard eight bells strike on the bridge, then fainter still from the forecandle head. Midnight.

Presently something aroused him. He opened his eyes, facing forward. The after deck was completely dark; but a light shone here and there in a cabin amidships. On the boat deck the radio shack was brilliantly illumined. Its two portholes glowed through the night. As Tod watched dreamily, they vanished in the surrounding darkness. "Sparks is turning in early," Tod thought. Then, like eyes, the two portholes winked twice, quickly.

At once he heard Bruce furtively throw off his blankets and rise.

His companion's bed was several feet to the left, near the taffrail where the patent log relentlessly clicked off the miles behind them. Tod was dimly aware that Bruce was hurriedly slipping into trousers and shirt. Presently, barefooted, the youth softly crossed the poop to the ladder and disappeared downward.

Tod raised himself on one elbow and gazed intently at the deck below. He discerned Bruce's lithe form silently going forward. A moment later, he saw the youth slip up the companionway amidships. Tod was at once wide awake. What did it mean? Had Toppy really been correct? What did these secret actions signify?

At length Tod saw a light flash out on the boat deck as Sparks opened the door of the wireless shack. For a second Bruce stood illumined in the glare. Fascinated, Tod gazed at the scene. He saw the wireless operator hold out his hand in which he glimpsed a paper. A message! Bruce reached for it, and then the door closed once more.

When Bruce returned a few minutes later, Tod apparently was asleep. He did not move, for he knew that his companion was probably reading his message under cover of his blanket with a pocket flashlight which he no doubt carried. Tod felt as though his friend had suddenly disappeared. Looking up at the great arch of the Milky

Way, with its stars so cold and remote, he felt a wave of intense loneliness sweep over him. He was alone on this tramp freighter with its strange crew and officers, steaming south to an island where he knew only trouble lay in wait for them. Every moment, with every turn of the ship's propeller, he was leaving his own country farther behind. A strange unknown lay ahead. His eyes closed; his mouth slid into a firm straight line. Well, he'd work this out alone, then! But what did Bruce's action mean? Why had his companion not taken him into his confidence? And why did Bruce play a lone hand when he, himself, was willing to help?

The stars danced mockingly at his questions. He turned on one side and closed his eyes. Soon the steady throb of the propeller and the whine of wind in the rigging wove themselves into his dreams.

A fog once more enveloped the ship. He was climbing the companionway to the boat deck. He beat upon a door and called: "Bruce—Bruce!" No answer came. Then, reaching in the open port and switching on the light, he saw a body stretched upon a bunk with a knife protruding just above the heart. On the locker opposite stood a black cat, his front paws kneading the cushion under him, his yellow eyes half-closed in dreamy ecstasy. Tod wanted to scream, to cry out. No sound, however, came from his lips. He was utterly alone on this phantom ship, sailing noiselessly through the mist. He moved his arms frantically, woke with a sudden start, and found himself lying on deck under the stars.

A cold sweat chilled his body; for the terrified face that he had seen staring lifelessly at the deck head was the face of his former friend, Bruce Harvey.

BLACK MAGIC

THE DAYS SLIPPED IMPERCEPTIBLY ASTERN. THE DULL ROUTINE OF LIFE at sea was interrupted only for a night off Hatteras when the *Congo* rolled and pitched like a skiff in a storm. Not until the Florida Keys fell away to starboard and Cuba swam into view did the tramp freighter reach the smooth seas of the tropics.

Strange rumours were circulating through the ship. A black cat stalked the decks at night. It appeared as if by magic in most unexpected places, then vanished at the first sound of a human voice.

An oiler glimpsed the uncanny creature one day in the shaft alley. That very night a coal-passer came upon it as it darted into the stokehole. Though the firemen could not confirm the story, though they had seen nothing resembling a cat passing through the fire room, that did not mar the authenticity of the narrative. For the next night, a seaman, climbing the rigging to the crow's nest, saw two eyes blazing down at him from the platform. Had he seen anything but the eyes? No—you couldn't expect him to hunt for trouble, could you? But those eyes! They glowed like clinker from a furnace.

One evening during his trick at the wheel, a quartermaster told the skipper what the men had seen. The Old Man laughed. He admitted that a cat, a black cat, had been found stowed away in a lifeboat; but it had been killed and the body thrown overboard.

Thrown overboard? The men knew better. A black beast, almost as large as a dog, walked the decks at night, looking for prey.

"Wot yer mean—prey?" Toppy said when he heard the

tale. "Blimey, 'e almost got me. Jumped right on my shoulder, 'e did. Ain't that the truth, kid?"

Bruce admitted that the cockney's story was true. What is more, Bruce had seen the beast several times. His stories, however, were told with such detail that even Toppy began to doubt them. "Tryin' ter pull our leg, 'e is. Thinks 'e knows it all—that college boy!"

But one night the stowaway appeared in reality to Tod and Bruce. They were sleeping on the poop deck when Tod was roused by something brushing his hand. He woke and saw a cat sitting calmly within reach. Two yellow eyes inspected him in the darkness.

The boy could not repress a start of terror. Those eyes, gleaming so weirdly there in the night, sent a quick spasm of fear through him. Then he smiled to himself, put out his hand, and stroked the cat's fur. The beast purred in contentment and moved closer. There was something about the creature, however, that Tod did not like. He hid the cat safely within the tarpaulin of the captain's gig, which rested near the taffrail. The boys remained silent about that encounter; and no one but Bruce knew why Black Jean favoured Tod with pie and fruit smuggled from the officers' mess.

With the first landfall in sight, the men in the firemen's forecastle waxed almost gay. Their anticipations of the delights of Havana were rudely shattered, however, by the announcement of the chief engineer that no shore leave would be granted.

"Yeh, jest watch the bloomin' horfficers go ashore, though," Toppy shrilled in his high falsetto. He had just come off watch at eight o'clock, and he now sat in his bunk. A sudden shower had sent the men below, where they voiced their resentment in surly retorts.

Bruce Harvey, from his seat atop the table, turned to Tod, who lay in his bunk. "Be a sailor and see the world through a porthole," he sang out gaily.

"Blimey, this is my last voyage," Toppy hastened to

inform them. "I cawn't even git drunk when I wants ter! Jest let me get 'ome to London, and I'll never sign on no more blarsted ships."

"Listen to the limejuicer," Panama Pete remarked. "When he gets to London, he won't stay ashore a week."

"Yah, he won't never leave the sea," Swede Jorgenson assented.

"Shut yer marf, you squarehead," Toppo rejoined.

Panama Pete nodded gloomily. "Maybe this'll be the last voyage for all of us. I don't think this jinx ship'll ever get to port again. No, not with a black cat that's dead running around every night."

"Yah, dat's right, cheer us up," Jorgenson added. "Just after we had canned goldfish for supper, tool"

Tod glanced up at the closed skylight where the rain beat steadily. He sighed. They were steaming into Havana harbour with the rain obscuring their first landfall. He had expected to see Havana rise out of the blue sea like a fairy city of yellow and gold. Instead, this rainfall hemmed them in like fog. Was this his dream of the tropic isles of the Caribbees?

"Gimme a match, Swede," Toppo went on. "Thanks. 'Ere comes the blarsted mess. I don't like 'im aroun'. 'E gives me the creeps."

"Aw, pipe down," broke in Panama. "He's only takin' some fresh air on the poop deck."

Black Jean paused at the doorway and glanced down at the men. "The Old Man's afraid yo' all jump ship at Havana," he informed them. "That's why yo' don't get ashore."

"Yeah, he's right, too," nodded the Swede who lay stretched on his bunk. "Give us a chance to git ashore, and we stay there. Never again a jinx ship for us, eh, matey?"

"Wot I wants ter know," the little Londoner essayed, "is who killed French Louie?"

"It was the jinx," Bruce replied with a grin.

"The jinx, me eye! It was a bloomin' blighter aboard this ship."

"It was the jinx all right," Black Jean nodded, as he came down the steps. "I know." He lowered his voice. "Voodoo done it."

The men looked at him in silence. Tod rose on one elbow and gazed across at the huge Negro. The man's immense chest heaved quickly beneath the thin white singlet; the biceps of his arm rippled as only a longshoreman's does. His rough-hewn face, Tod perceived, was, nevertheless, as inscrutable as death.

"What do you mean, mess?" Tod asked.

"Jest what Ah tells yo', boy," Black Jean replied, as he seated himself on the steps. "Ah was bo'n on San Felipe, but Ah leave an' go to New Orleans when six years old. Ah go back to the island four years ago but stay only a few months. But I remember Gallardo then. He was a rich planter; he was cruel, too, to the coloured folks theah. One night he killed a nigger in a fight. His partner hide him fo' a week till a ship come in; then Gallardo slip aboard an' git away. If a white man kills a native on San Felipe, he has to leave quick befo' they kill him. Ah knows."

"Oh, he had a partner?"

"Yassah, a American named Brixton. They run the only plantation on the island—sugar cane. Gallardo is crazy to try to go back. The sign of the voodoo is on him. He neber git there."

"Ye're crazy yerself." Toppy scowled. "I don't believe in any bloomin' voodoo signs."

The mess man bridled. "Oh, yo' don't? Well, Ah can put a *wanga*, a chahm on yo' that'll make yo' sick in fo' hours."

"That's all superstition," Bruce grinned. "We don't believe a word of it, do we, Toppy?"

"Blimey, no," Toppy agreed. Nevertheless, he edged deeper into his bunk.

Tod saw the Negro's eyes gleam sharply. "I show yo'," he announced. "Yo' give me a piece of Toppo's hair and I make a chahm. Then yo' believe."

"A good idea," Bruce smiled eagerly. "Let's help the mess make a charm. Shall we?"

"Sure—sure!" Panama Pete hailed the idea with delight.

Bruce jumped from the table. "Give me a pair of scissors, someone."

"Here, I got one," Panama answered. He reached into his duffle bag beneath his bunk and brought forth from his mending kit a shining pair of scissors.

"Gawd blimey, wot yer doin'?" Toppo wailed. "Don't try no blarsted stuff on me!"

But the men were not to be stopped at this late moment. Panama Pete and Bruce held the struggling cockney until Tod heard a sharp clip of the scissors. With a yell of delight, Bruce rushed to the Negro, holding aloft in mock display a short lock of Toppo's yellow hair.

"Here it is," said Bruce with a sweeping bow. "Here's the scoffer. Now, mess, do your stuff."

The mess man did not smile. He rose with dignity and climbed the steps. "I fix the chahm now. That man won't go on watch tonight. He be too sick."

Tod smiled and Bruce howled with glee. Only Toppo's distraught glance wavered uncertainly around the fore-castle. "I don't like it," he remarked. "'Ow kin a feller believe a silly blighter like the mess? But I don't like it."

Black Jean paused on the top step. He spoke in a voice low and vibrating in its intensity. "Yo' wait. Yo' laugh at voodoo chahm, yes? I show yo'."

He departed amidst a roar of applause.

"Are you sick already?" Bruce asked solemnly. "Shall I call the skipper for a dose of medicine?"

"Shut yer marf! A bloke like you don't know nothin'."

"As a member of one of the first families, old thing," Bruce began loftily, "I am led to believe—" His speech

abruptly ended, for Tod had silenced him with a shoe.

When the *Congo*, still in a driving rain, docked at a Havana wharf, Toppy did not crawl from his bunk to glimpse the city. Tod found him stirring restlessly.

"I feel bad, Joe Macaroni," he whispered. "It ain't the charm that's workin'. I heard about them Haiti niggers; they poison you. Suppose the mess put poison in my grub. Wot then?"

"Aw, they're kidding you," Tod replied as he turned in. Through the porthole near his right hand he could see only the misty outlines of a concrete wharf. In his ears was the steady beat of rain on deck.

At four o'clock in the morning when the oiler came to call the firemen for their watch, Toppy would not stir from his bunk. Tod, rousing himself, heard the little fireman moaning. "I'm sick—sick," he murmured hoarsely. "I can't move."

Not to go on watch was the crowning sin at sea. The oiler roused Panama Pete. "Yeh, let 'im take my place. 'E ain't got much firing in port," Toppy said sourly. "'E laughed at the mess, 'e did. Now let 'im take my watch."

Panama Pete crawled from his bunk in a rage. "You're playing with us, Toppy," he accused. "We was only kiddin' you last night. You better go below."

"I wish I could. Gawd strike me bline if I ain't sick! I'm goin' ter die."

"You're foolin'," Panama Pete went on. "Did you see the black cat again?"

Tod slipped to the floor and crossed to the little Londoner's bunk. "Are you really sick?" he asked. He put up his hand and touched Toppy's brow. It was hot and feverish. Tod turned to the men. "He's got a fever all right. Better let someone take his place below. You only need steam for the winches."

Grumbling, Panama Pete complied. The forecastle once more settled down to quiet. The silence of the ship without the regular beat of the propeller below them made

Tod restless. He slept only fitfully until seven o'clock came around.

Bruce was up first. "He's sick all right," Bruce said as he came over to Tod's bunk. "I can't understand it. He's only imagining things."

"I'm dyin', I tell yer," Topsy moaned. "You blarsted blokes done me in."

"I'll call the skipper," Bruce said in a low tone. "He'll give him some medicine, then he'll be better."

"Medicine, me eye!" Topsy shrilled. "It won't do no good. That bloomin' charm is workin'."

Tod sat by the sick man while Bruce was gone. He heard the rattle of the winches on deck as the *Congo* unloaded her cargo from a forward hatch. The sun shone with a bright morning glare; but it did not cheer the man in the bunk. "I'm a goner," he whispered. "I feel awful."

"Where are you sick?" Tod asked.

"Blimey, I dunno. All over."

When Bruce returned with the captain, Tod drew aside. Captain Barry placed a thermometer in Topsy's mouth and announced a few minutes later that the man's fever registered over a hundred.

Topsy greeted this announcement with a groan of agony. "I told yer so." Yet he seemed almost happy that the little instrument testified to the truth of his words.

"Stay in bed today," the captain told him as he departed. "I'll send down some medicine. If ye get worse, I'll have to turn Gallardo out of sick bay and put you there."

"Sick bay. Gawd strike me pink if I'll go there! Lemme die here."

Captain Barry turned upon him sternly. "If necessary, we'll carry ye there. Ye'll do just as I say."

Topsy collapsed with a heartrending moan. "It's voodoo done it," he whispered.

The little captain pulled at his beard; his brows knit, and a cold, appraising glance swept across to Bruce. "Has he been out o' his head all night?" he asked.

"No, sir. He just got that way."

Toppy rose on one elbow. "I know what I'm a-syin', sir. It was the voodoo charm that done it."

The little captain raised his arms in a gesture of rage. "Is everyone batty on this ship? If that man isn't well by tonight, he goes to sick bay." He turned and pounded up the steps. "Bilgel!" he muttered. "Bilgel!"

Tod winked slyly at Bruce. "By golly, I'll tell you what I'll do," he exclaimed. "I'll go see the mess and tell him the charm is working."

"Righto," Toppy eagerly put in. "Tell 'im to throw the charm overboard."

"Sure," Tod replied. "I'll go at once."

He and Bruce climbed to deck. Across the sparkling waters of the bay, Morro Castle, small and uninviting, glistened in the sunlight. A United Fruit liner was coming up the roadstead with flags flying, orchestra playing, and passengers leaning over the white rails. Behind them the Malecon was busy with its water front traffic.

"Shall we ask the mess to take away the evil spell?" Tod grinned.

Bruce threw back his head and laughed. "That isn't necessary. It's only Toppy's imagination that's making him sick."

They waited ten minutes, then once more descended to the cabin.

"It's gone overboard," Tod announced. "The mess says that he only wanted to show you that the charm can work. He says you'll get better now. You ought to be up in an hour."

Toppy heaved a deep sigh. "Thanks, Joe Macaroni. I feel better already."

"Get up and dress," Bruce urged. "Go on deck and get fresh air."

Topsy crawled weakly from his bunk. His eyes seemed to brighten. "Yeah, I feel better. Blimey, but that was a narrow escape. Now I know wo't 'appened to Frenchie. They charmed 'im crazy, thinkin' that the bloomin' Galardo was sleepin' in sick bay."

That afternoon, when the wipers climbed to deck from their work in the engine room, they found Topsy leaning over the bulwarks. The *Congo* had finished discharging and was now steaming out the roadstead.

"Yeah, I'm working Panama's shift, too," Topsy remarked in a contented voice. "I'm all right now."

Bruce and Tod, meeting each other's eye, smiled. They hung over the rail, watching Havana as it dipped into the sea with the red roofs flashing back the rays of the sun.

"See the world through a porthole," Tod sang out with a smile.

Bruce gave a short laugh. "Well, we saw something more interesting, didn't we, Tod? Imagine the natives of these islands cowering under the spell of voodoo." He cast a glance of pity at Topsy's vanishing head. "We understand now how black magic does its deadly work."

AT THE CAFÉ MARTINIQUE

AS THE CONGO STEAMED SOUTH, THE SUN BEAT DOWN UPON HER STEEL decks with a pitiless intensity. The men stretched a canvas over the poop and slept there when off watch, but the frequent tropical showers soon penetrated the thin covering, sending them growling below to the sweltering fore-castle. There, naked and sweating, they dozed in their bunks till the oiler languidly roused them for duty in the engine room.

Below deck, the heat became almost unbearable. Each morning Tod and Bruce wiped the gratings and the plates of the floor, then went aloft to their washing of the walls. As they slowly worked downward, they drew nearer to the hot oil tanks. Here the stifling air and the terrific heat allowed them to work only for fifteen minutes at a time, when, dripping with sweat, panting for breath, they dragged themselves up the ladder for a few moments' rest on deck. When two bells sounded five o'clock in the engine room, they slowly made their way aft; not until they stood under the saltwater shower did they revive.

"I've a sure idea for making money when I get home," Bruce chuckled one evening as he leaned over the bulwarks watching Haiti draw near. "I'll hang out a shingle as a weight reducer; then I'll send all the fat men of New York to sea to work in the engine room of a steamer. Why, the idea is priceless!"

Tod grinned in reply. He could not understand why Bruce, with all his charming gaiety, his courage in face of any odds, was not more of a friend. Between them, Tod felt some secret rising. Why did not Bruce confide in him?

Tod let his gaze sweep out over the sea at a distant line of beach. The ship had made the Windward Passage, with Cuba to the north and Haiti off the port beam. Gonave Island had come abreast of them that afternoon. Soon they would be docking at Port au Prince.

"Do you think we'll get ashore here?" Tod asked.

"If there's a chance, just watch me, old chap."

"Let's take in the town together."

Bruce waved aside the suggestion. "In half an hour, we'll tie up." He turned from his seat on the iron bitt, and suddenly his voice grew earnest. "Look here, Tod, I don't want you to be too friendly with me."

Tod swung about. "Why, what do you mean?" he stammered.

"I can't explain now," Bruce said quickly; "but I'm deeper into this mess than I ever thought I'd be. I'm just beginning to realize how serious it is. I don't want to drag you into my personal affairs. I haven't got the right; it's too dangerous."

"Dangerous?" Tod echoed almost joyfully. "Listen, Bruce, you don't think I'm afraid, do you? Why, I'll stand by you in anything—anything."

"Thanks, Tod, I know you would. But I can't explain now. Perhaps, after we leave Port au Prince—" He paused and his glance wavered. "It's almost time for chow. Let's go forward."

That night at eight, when they docked at Port au Prince, Tod somehow lost sight of Bruce. He felt hurt, as though the older youth were treating him as he would a child. He felt, too, a sharp anger rising within him. Well, let Bruce Harvey go his own way; he didn't care. But what should he do that evening? Here was his ship, tied up at a foreign port, and he was not allowed to land. Looking across the twilit water, he discovered a corrugated-iron warehouse; and above that two brown cathedral towers. Not much here; he'd better get a book from the ship's library and read for the evening.

A box of books, changed each voyage, was kept by the radio operator in his shack and the contents given out when wanted. Tod climbed the silent companion-way to the boat deck, passed the sick bay with a glance of curiosity, and knocked upon the door of the wireless shack.

"Come in," said a voice.

Tod entered and found a young man of twenty-three or -four seated at his desk, evidently writing a letter to be mailed at that port. "I've come after a book," Tod explained.

"Help yourself," Sparks replied. "They don't amount to much. Mostly Sunday-school literature—the kind of books nice ladies ashore think seamen ought to read."

Tod smiled as he bent over the box.

"The men want Western stories," Sparks resumed. "They want cowboy heroes, and two-gun men, and sheriffs chasing outlaws. And look what they get!" He waved a derisive hand at the books. "Isn't that swell stuff?"

Tod, however, had found one book that caught his interest. It evidently was written by a missionary and was called: *Mission Huts in the Caribbean*. In running his hand over the pages, his eyes had seen a chapter title: *The Voodoo Cult in Haiti*. He slipped the book under his arm.

As he rose, he perceived that the radio operator was surveying him closely. "Say, kid, aren't you a friend of that wiper Bruce Harvey?"

Tod nodded. "Why, I think so."

The operator tapped his fingers nervously on the desk: "I'm afraid," he said at last, "that I've let him in for trouble."

Tod looked up. "Trouble?"

"Yes, and for me, too. Look here, now, don't say anything—but that fellow has been sending messages and getting replies. He paid me well, and I said nothing. But today the captain found out, and, as a result, this

will probably be my last job." He paused a second, then went on hurriedly: "Harvey got a message last night. It was from Port au Prince. The second mate must have seen the boy come up here and get it, because he brought the Old Man in and accused me. I had to give them a copy then to save myself. They threatened me if I told. Said, if I didn't, they'd get it themselves. Well, I've got to warn the kid. Tell him not to go there tonight."

"Go where?"

"To the Café Martinique at nine-thirty. That was the message. He'll understand. Tell Harvey that the skipper is wise. He'd better watch out."

"But Bruce must have gone already," Tod rejoined. "I can't find him on deck. And I don't see how he got ashore, for the quartermaster is guarding the gangway."

Sparks contemplated him with a deep glance full of meaning. "There are more ways of getting ashore than the gangway," he said at last.

Tod nodded. "Thanks. I understand."

Once more in the firemen's quarters, Tod placed his book beneath his pillow and took his coat and cap. Quietly he went on deck again and glanced forward. At the gangway he discerned a quartermaster standing guard. Crossing to the opposite bulwarks, he perceived in the growing dusk that a Jacob's ladder hung suspended overside. On the water below waited a skiff manned by two Haitian boatmen. As they saw him gazing downward, one of the men lifted his voice in a sibilant whisper, "Want to go ashore, monsieur?"

With a hurried glance over his shoulder to see if he were observed, Tod swung himself over the rail and carefully made his way down the rope ladder. He dropped into the boat with a fast-beating heart. "Did you take anyone else ashore tonight?" he asked.

The man on the middle thwart grinned as he motioned him into the sternsheets. "Monsieur, we take five men already. We bring you back."

"Do you know where the Café Martinique is?" the boy asked.

"Two blocks down the wharf, then turn south into St. Nazaire Street. You see all sailors there."

Night closed down swiftly. In the shadows Tod gave the men the required coin and sprang up a ladder of a wharf which lay some fifty yards below the spot where the *Congo* was moored.

Tod followed their directions. St. Nazaire was more of an alley than a street, he thought, as he walked along the narrow pavement. Café lights shone here and there. He passed huge Negro stevedores swaying along the cobbles; a Haitian *gendarme* went by. Above, the sky was a luminous blue. From a doorway came the musical notes of a guitar; Negro voices hummed a Creole song.

At a corner, he halted. Over a doorway he saw the words: Café Martinique. He peered into the interior through windows none too clean.

Two oil lamps, burning in brackets on the walls, revealed a bar behind which stood a Haitian in soiled white clothes. At the tables a few loungers sat over their drinks. Tod searched the room, and at last, in one corner, saw Bruce Harvey sitting alone.

Tod entered and crossed to his table. Bruce looked up with surprise gleaming in his dark eyes. "Well, old chap," he said impudently, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

Tod tossed his words aside with a gesture of annoyance. "Be serious for once, Bruce," he said, dropping into a chair. "I've brought you a message from Sparks."

Bruce, taken aback, gazed at him with new interest. "From Sparks? Why, what's wrong?"

"The skipper discovered your message of last night. He threatened Sparks if he told. The captain and the second mate will probably be here before long. You'd better leave."

"Leavel But I can't. I'm to meet someone here."

"What if the skipper comes?"

"There'll be the deuce to pay. But I'll stay in spite of it."

Tod sighed in resignation. "All right. I'll stay, too. You'll need help."

Bruce's face broke into an engaging smile. "Old thing," he said, "you're a rum bird. Even if you don't know what it's all about, you'll stay?"

Tod nodded.

Suddenly Bruce became serious. "Yes, I'll be needing help, all right. Tod, I'm going to tell you all I know. I see you're bound to be in this. Well, in the first place, my full name is Bruce Harvey Denton."

Tod started. "Of the Denton Fruit Company?"

"Yes; that's the pater. He doesn't know I'm on the *Congo*; he wouldn't have allowed it. You see, I flunked out of college and can't go back for six months. That made the governor so peeved that he told me I was on my own. Oh, we had a big scene! He raged up and down our library; said I was a disgrace to the family. If I couldn't support myself for six months, he wouldn't send me back to college. I tell you, I got out quick!"

He paused and wiped a damp hand across his brow. "Peggy—that's my sister—had the idea that I ought to ship out on one of our freighters. She got Dad to give me a letter instructing the skippers of any of his ships to give me a job. But he didn't want me to sign on as the son of the owner. He wanted me treated as a member of the crew. He said I deserved it.

"I'd heard about this jinx ship for two years, and I couldn't understand what was wrong. I thought I'd come along this voyage and find out. Well, here I am!"

"And have you found out anything?"

Bruce smiled ruefully. "Not very much. But I'm sure of one thing, and so are you—the captain is behind some of this. I sent a wireless to the representative of the company in Havana; I wanted to ask him some questions.

Then I couldn't get ashore. Here, I was more lucky. The agent should arrive at nine-thirty."

"Couldn't we meet him some place else?"

"It's too late now. Look around—do you see anyone from the *Congo*?"

Tod gazed round at the other tables. Three Negroes, evidently longshoremen from the appearance of their huge muscular bodies, sat at a table near them. Two swarthy Haitians conversed in soft tones at a table near the window.

"I don't like the looks of this place," Bruce admitted. "But our agent said the Martinique, and here I am."

They ordered a lunch and waited. Perhaps ten minutes later, Bruce looked up quickly. Tod, following his glance, saw that an American of perhaps fifty had entered the café. He stood a moment surveying the room; then he advanced to their table. "Bruce Harvey?" he asked. Then as he took in the youth before him, his face lighted up. "Good heavens! Aren't you young Denton?"

Bruce nodded. He took the man's hand, then introduced his friend. "We've got to leave soon, Mr. Milner," he said. "The skipper is on to our little game."

Mr. Milner sat down and gazed intently at the two youths. "Your father knows you're aboard the *Congo*? No? Well, I see you're a chip off the old block."

"Keep watch, Tod, while I tell Mr. Milner what happened," Bruce whispered. He turned to the man. "Maybe you can help us," he added.

When the story was finished, the agent nodded slowly. "I think I begin to see," he said. "For two years or more, the *Congo* has had new crews. Only the captain and second mate have remained."

Bruce leaned forward. "I've heard Dad say that Mr. Sharp, the second mate, has had several chances to be promoted but wouldn't take them. Now, why?"

"Let's see what the second mate does," Mr. Milner ruminated. "He has charge of the cargo. Is it possible

that he doesn't want anyone else to know too much about that?"

Tod's mind flashed back to a scene on the Brooklyn dock, to a captain and second mate who furtively loaded boxes into number two hold at midnight. His heart beat faster. "That's it. The cargo!" The words rushed swiftly from his lips. The two listeners sat spellbound.

"Clue number one!" Bruce exclaimed. "What was that cargo? Think, Mr. Milner! What's going on here in the Caribbean for two years past that——"

The agent stopped him with upraised hand. "I've got it!" he cried softly. "Contraband." He thought for a moment, and his eyes gleamed. "This is apt to be bigger than we expected," he said at last. "Listen! For two years there have been several uprisings among the natives of these islands, among the Central American republics, too. With our government keeping an eye on these islands, it's against the law to sell the natives firearms. The question has been: who smuggles in the arms for these men? Can it be the *Congo*?"

"Would the skipper and mate be making money?"

"Money! Man, they'll soon be rolling in wealth if that is their work."

"Don't you see?" said Tod. "That's why they want to give the *Congo* a bad name—so that new men will ship on her. The same crew might learn too much."

"But what has this Gallardo to do with it?" Mr. Milner asked. "Then there's the murder of this fireman. That isn't explained."

Bruce leaned over. "But it will be when we get through with this, won't it, Tod?"

Tod nodded.

"No—no!" Mr. Milner put up his hand. "This is a bigger thing than I ever dreamed of. It's so big that I can't believe it yet. But I can't take any chances with you, Bruce Denton. You're going to stay here with me and go home on the next boat."

"What!" Bruce almost jumped from his chair. "Just when we begin to see light? Why, I'm in this with my friend here; and I can't let him see it through alone."

"Oh, we can arrange that," Mr. Milner smiled. "The company can send you both home on its next steamer."

Bruce shook his head. "Then nothing will be proved. We only have our suspicions, that's all. No—Tod and I are going back to the *Congo*."

"You're insane! You're too young to know your danger. Why, if this is true, if this captain and mate are really doing what we surmise, the lives of you two boys are not worth a penny. No; I can't allow it."

Tod glanced up. So immersed in their heated discussion had they been that they had not noticed the approach of the three Negro stevedores. Tod had been watching for a sight of Captain Barry or Mr. Sharp. Too late he realized that these three men might be their hirelings. He saw one of them step to the lamp and turn it low. A bottle, cutting through the air, crashed against the second lamp. It went shattering to the floor in a ruddy glow. Oaths flew across the café. The men leaped toward them.

"Fight!" yelled Bruce.

"The side door," Tod heard Mr. Milner call out. Even as he spoke, the man flung the table to the floor. The crash echoed through the room.

Tod swung out. His fist struck a man's chest. Through the boy surged a sharp feeling of anger. Stepping back to avoid a blow, pressing forward into that dark mass of struggling bodies, he sent his fists flying with all his strength, all his weight behind them.

Pandemonium broke loose. In the darkness of the café, the fight raged like a sudden storm; it swayed across the room, dashed against the wall. Tod found himself driven into a corner with a frenzied battle thundering about him. Shouts, cries, curses were in his ears. His arms flashed out blindly, meeting a solid wall of towering

strength that bruised his knuckles and jolted his arms in their sockets. Blows rained upon him; a guttural laugh drew closer.

A fist caught him full upon the jaw. His head flew back, striking the wall behind him. A great flare of light shot across his vision. A voice shrilled at the doorway, "*Gendarme! Gendarme!*"

Tod swayed. A tide of engulfing blackness flowed toward him. He crumpled to the floor.

A voice, faint and distant, stabbed through his daze. "Tod—Tod!" He opened his eyes.

Bruce bent above him. "They're gone. They escaped by the side door. The police are here. Hurt?"

"No—though I feel as if an elephant had stepped on my face." As he was helped into a chair, he put up a hand to his jaw. "It seems to be still there."

"Here, drink this," said Mr. Milner. "I hope you both understand what you're up against now. You're coming to my home—both of you!"

"No," Bruce hastened to remonstrate, "we're not going home with you, Mr. Milner. We're going back to the ship."

"What?"

"Yes. If it were only the *Congo*, I'd stay. But you yourself said it was something bigger. That is—if Tod is with me." His gaze searched Tod's face, and the boy nodded in reply.

Bruce put his arm about Tod's shoulder. "We know what the danger is now. We'll be ready. The captain doesn't yet know who I am. There's still a chance. We're going back."

"I feel like having you two arrested for insanity," Mr. Milner scowled; but Tod saw a gleam of approval in his glance. "This is your last opportunity. Are you staying?"

"No," Tod answered. "I'm with Bruce. We're going to see this through together."



CHAPTER VI

"THE GOAT WITHOUT HORNS"

TWO DAYS LATER, THE CONGO PUT TO SEA. SHE ROUNDED CAPE DAME Marie and, swinging south, shoved her blunt nose down the Latitudes. Not once, either by sign or intimation, did Captain Barry give Tod any evidence that he knew what had happened in the Café Martinique. The boy passed him one noon in the port alleyway, but the little master of the *Congo* only favoured him with a beady glance.

The second evening out of Port au Prince, Tod climbed to his bunk in the deserted forecandle too tired even to ascend the ladder to the poop where the men were grouped. Through the open skylight he could hear the low murmur of their voices. Directly beneath him sounded the rhythmical throb of the great propeller. He sighed in contentment. After a day spent in the engine room, the heat of the forecandle was scarcely noticed.

Abruptly his eyes rested upon the brown covers of a book lying on the crossbeam overhead. At the sight, his mind leaped awake. Switching on the electric bulb in the deck head, he opened the book to the chapter on voodoo. He read with mounting interest:

It is not only in Haiti that the voodoo worship is practised; the cult of the little green serpent flourishes in the outlying

islands as well. Here in the Caribbean is transplanted a bit of Africa. The natives are of pure Congo stock, brought to the New World by the early slavers. Untouched as they are by Western influences, the African beliefs and customs still prevail.

The religious ceremonials are presided over by the native king or Papaloi and the queen or Mamaloi. These abominable rites are held at the dead of night when the moon is crescent-shaped. Planters who would prosper on these islands must not interfere in these weird practices, or the sugar cane will not be cut.

Only a few white men have ever witnessed these ceremonies. A newspaper man from the States, curious as to the truth of many whispered stories of voodoo rites, was known to have disguised himself and attended a feast of the sacred cult. He never returned, and the supposition is that the natives discovered his presence. Those natives who tell what goes on at these meetings are silenced forever.

Tod shivered and turned a page. As he read on, his breath came faster:

On the island of San Felipe, the most primitive forms of voodoo worship are still practised. This small island lies south of Haiti and is almost wholly populated by natives of pure Congo blood. Two white men who had the hardihood to open a plantation there, were plunged into bloodshed because one of them objected to the terrible rites carried on by the ignorant Negroes of Arada stock.

At these feasts, a cock or a goat is sacrificed; but on some extremely important festivals a "Goat Without Horns" is thought necessary. What this is, I dare not tell. Even now that I write from the comparative safety of a Canadian parish, my pen trembles at the words.

Tod hastily turned a page. A Goat Without Horns! What in Heaven's name was that? Search as he would,

however, he found no further mention of the strange phrase.

He jumped from his bunk and went on deck. Somehow, he felt he needed fresh air. He leaned over the bulwarks and gazed across the tropic sea. This island of San Felipe was their next landfall; it might rise from the Caribbean at any moment that night. He felt the steady quickening of his pulse. Wouldn't that be adventure—to land on San Felipe!

A sudden loud rumble of thunder made him glance forward. Off the starboard beam he saw intermittent flashes of lightning. A tropical squall was rolling up from the south. The air was heavy and oppressive.

Startled, Tod turned as the Negro mess man emerged on bare feet from the darkness of the after deck. Black Jean stood in the soft glow of the washroom light. Tod gazed at his huge form with renewed interest. What marvellous shoulders the man had! He was built like a gladiator. His muscles rippled under his shirt; his great thighs bulged from his blue dungarees. Something in his attitude gave Tod the conviction that, now that San Felipe drew near, the mess man was restless, perturbed.

"Mess," Tod asked suddenly, "who do you think killed French Louie?"

Black Jean came closer. "The second mate done it—that's who! It wasn't the cap'n, 'cause Ah see him talking to Gallardo ebery day. Those two are big friends."

"Friends? You're mistaken, Jean."

"No, boss, Ah ain't. The skipper an' Gallardo are big friends. But that second mate! Doan' he libe in the cabin right next doah to sick bay? Wasn't it easy fo' him to slip in theah that night? It was Mr. Sharp that stuck his knife in French Louie—only he thought it was Gallardo."

Tod meditated a moment. "Bruce thinks that someone is hiding on this ship. Maybe the skipper is helping this fellow."

"No, boy, Ah doan' think so. Maximilian is the only stowaway on boa'd."

"The men are scared stiff of that cat, Jean. They think he's a spirit, a ghost, that brings bad luck."

Black Jean chuckled. "That's why Ah take Max to San Felipe. The coloured folks there doan' like black cats. When they see him follow me roun' like a dog, they think Ah'm big conjure doctor."

"Then you don't really believe in voodoo?"

Black Jean turned and stolidly met his eye. "Doan' yo' talk about voodoo here, boy. It won't be good fo' yo'. No niggers believe now like they used to when Ah was boy on San Felipe. Times change now."

Tod lowered his voice. "What is a Goat Without Horns?"

The Negro caught his breath sharply. In the shadowy half-light Tod saw his eyes burn with sudden feeling. "Who tell yo' that?" he stuttered.

"No one. I read about it. What's it mean?"

"Hush!" the mess man cautioned. Upon his negroid countenance was an expression of terror. "Neber say that." Silently, like a shadow, he moved away.

With a nervous movement Tod crossed to the star-board alleyway and came out a moment later on the fore deck. Hazy banks of clouds obscured the stars; low in the east a crescent moon was dimly visible. As he crossed the hatches to the fore-castle head, he paused, listening. In his ears was a sound like a low, prolonged hiss.

Once before, the impression had entered his mind that the *Congo* possessed a sinister personality. That was on the night of French Louie's murder, when the ship had sounded her whistle with an exultant scream and then steamed on through the fog. Now, again, he was vaguely conscious of this malignant spirit of the ship. With her funnel spouting black coils of smoke, she seemed to be pushing her blunt nose through the sea

with a panting breath. As she headed south for the stormy cloud, that breath became a faint, murmuring hiss.

He was imagining things, he told himself. That wouldn't do! He swung hastily up the ladder to the fore-castle head and, passing round the windlass and the cables, leaned over the port rail. Another figure stood there in the darkness, silently gazing overside. Tod, looking closely, recognized the cabin passenger.

"Weather looks bad," Señor Gallardo confided in a friendly tone. "The skipper says the barometer has been falling all day. Tonight Sparks reports a hurricane a few hundred miles to the southwest. The officers are worried. But I'm not. I only want to get to San Felipe. We'll soon be there."

"You'll be glad to land?"

"Yes; because then I get my hands on the man I thought my friend. He cheated me of all the money we put in our plantation. He thinks I'll never come back because of the natives; but I'll surprise him."

Tod moved closer. "Do the natives on San Felipe believe in voodoo?"

The man gave him a quick glance. "Why do you ask? But it is true, no? They keep it a secret. They tell you that they believe in the religion that the missionaries teach. Bah! On nights like this, when a new moon is out, you hear drums beating over the hills. In the dead of night they meet in a clearing in the bush. What do they do? My partner knows. He attends their meetings, and that is why he remains on San Felipe. And that is why I was driven out."

"What is a Goat Without Horns?" Tod pursued.

Señor Gallardo started; his hands closed on the rail in a viselike grip. "*Nombre de Dios*," he uttered softly. "Who told you that?" He turned his wide, dark eyes upon Tod, and the boy was aware that the man was tense in the midst of sudden agitation.

"A Goat Without Horns," Gallardo answered at length in a tremulous voice, "is a human sacrifice."

"What!"

"Yes—you do not believe it, eh? Then you must. This is Africa. Does it change in a day? No. A quart of life's blood is what they need for the ceremony of the Goat Without Horns. But only rarely do the Arada Negroes call for such a sacrifice. On special occasions—perhaps once a year. That is why I left San Felipe."

Señor Gallardo paused and gazed overside at the prow of the ship where it cut the smooth water like a knife thrust, sending the phosphorescent waves glittering against the sides. "Yes," he repeated, "that is why I left."

"I was in the Negro quarter one night when I heard a child cry out. I put my head in the door of a hut and asked what was wrong. 'Sick,' an old witch of a woman told me. The patient was a little girl of ten or twelve who had been left an orphan a year before. I asked if I should call the missionary doctor five miles down the coast. The old woman said no—the child would be better in the morning.

"But all that evening I was nervous, uneasy. You understand? I could hear the native drums beating in the bush. I told my partner the niggers were probably up to some of their fiendish actions; but he said to leave them alone or we'd get no work done. It was true. I went outside at eleven o'clock. A new moon was up, and the drums sounded nearer. Back in the hills behind the plantation great fires blazed in a clearing in the bush. Then, as I listened, I heard the great voodoo drum—the Devil Drum, I called it. Its beat was louder, deeper, than the others, and I knew it meant a special meeting. All night it kept up its infernal noise. Ugh! it makes me creep to think of it.

"Next morning, I went to ask about the sick girl. She was gone and I could find no trace of her."

Señor Gallardo spat out the last words with an oath.

His hands clenched; but his voice, when he resumed, was low and steady. "I felt sick and weak and angry, too. You understand? But, of course, I wasn't sure of anything. I questioned the natives. You might as well talk to wooden posts! They knew nothing. God! I could have murdered the lot. That morning I took my pistol and sought out the conjure man who lived in the bush. The Papaloi, they call him. I accused him. He denied it, of course. Then, in my anger, I struck at him. At once two niggers closed on me. I pulled out my automatic and fired. I think I killed one of them.

"Then I had to run. My life wasn't worth a penny on San Felipe after that. My partner hid me for a week until an interisland sloop came in, and finally I reached New Orleans. My partner wrote only once. Said the crops were not good and no money came in. And 'don't come back, Gallardo, for the natives will kill you.' Come back? I've been waiting four years to return."

Tod quivered at the intensity of the man's words. In his mind he could hear the throb of the Devil Drum as it sent out its message through the night; he could see the great fires burning in the clearing in the bush, and the natives coming from miles around to the midnight gathering.

Señor Gallardo raised his head. "That island is not for white men. Never leave this ship, boy; never set foot on land there. I go only for one hour—then my work is done." His voice trailed off into the stillness of the night. Once again sounded the distant thunder. He pointed to the south. "Do you see a dark line off there, and a light?"

Tod let his gaze sweep out across the long, low swells. "Yes, I do—a light."

"That," said the cabin passenger grimly, "is San Felipe."

INTO THE HURRICANE

"WAKE UP, TOD! WE'RE ANCHORED OFF SAN FELIPE." BRUCE'S VOICE PIERCED through the boy's dreams. He stirred; but even before he opened his eyes he became aware of a deathlike silence that pervaded the ship. The great propeller no longer throbbed beneath him; the steel bulkhead at his side was still. Did he only imagine that the quiet air was heavy with suspense? He sprang to the floor. San Felipe!

He was slipping into his dungarees when he pitched violently against a bench. He clutched the table for support. The *Congo* was tossing from side to side, doubtless straining at her anchor chain. What did that mean? He hurried to deck and joined Bruce beneath the awning on the poop.

"Gosh, old chap, look at those swells coming in from sea." Bruce stood by the taffrail, his leg braced against a stanchion. Tod, with a curious feeling of trepidation, crossed to the patent log and looked about him. The *Congo* swung at anchor in a narrow bay. About them a green jungle crept down to the very edge of the tossing water; palms stood motionless against a hazy sky. Not a breath of air was stirring, yet huge swells continued to sweep toward them from the sea.

"Hurricane weather," Tod remarked succinctly. "Are we discharging cargo yet?"

Bruce shook his head. He pointed to the innermost part of the bay where a small jetty extended into the water. "That must be Gallardo's plantation behind those trees."

Tod, looking closely, beheld a long, low dwelling with a cluster of thatched huts to one side. Behind these, the

cut remains of a cane field stretched back toward hills, blue in the distance. "Seen anything of his partner?" Tod inquired.

"Not yet; I haven't seen a soul stir on that wharf. The place seems dead. I wish we'd discharge and get away. I heard the Old Man storming round the boat deck because no lighter had come out for the cargo. I'm with him. I don't like this place."

"You're right—there's trouble in the air."

"I suppose we feel the heat," Bruce laughed. He came closer. "When I get home, I'm going to find the reason for putting electric fans in every officer's cabin and not a single one in either fo'c'sle."

Tod, glancing over at his friend, decided that the Bruce of the Brooklyn dock had completely vanished; here in his place stood a member of the Black Gang. Like Tod himself, he now wore only a thin white singlet and black overalls. His bare feet were thrust into a pair of Mexican straw slippers.

"Max has got loose again," Bruce whispered. "I just looked under the tarp."

"The gig's empty? Maybe he's in Black Jean's cabin. If the little devil is out, we'll be hearing more stories about the jinx. Just wait!—Well, let's go forward and stow away some food."

As they crossed to the mess room, Tod gazed up at the hazy clouds that obscured the sun. Beyond the low headlands, a black mass was visible on the horizon.

The cook, with worried brow, confronted them in the alleyway. "Say, will one of you fellows give me a hand with chow?" he greeted them. He drew a fat hand across his face, which dripped with perspiration. "The mess slipped his cable early this morning and went ashore."

The two wipers gazed at him in surprise.

"Yeah," resumed the cook, slowly; "he must 'a' beat it as soon as we dropped anchor. Took all his gear with him, too."

So that was where Max had gone! "Sure, I'll help you," Tod replied. He was relieved to think that the mess man had departed with the impish stowaway. The conviction remained, however, that he had not seen the last of that shadowy creature with the two yellow eyes.

In the galley, a narrow compartment running between the port and starboard alleyways just forward of the engine-room entrance, Tod paused only long enough to get the men's food. The place was as hot and steamy as a Turkish bath. The conversation of the cook, too, was tropical. For breakfast Tod served the men sticky rolled oats and watery milk. A plate of beans, great hunks of bread several days old, and a pot of coffee completed the meal. He ate hurriedly, then returned to the galley to help with the officers' mess in the saloon.

"Now be careful how you serve the grub to the Old Man," the cook warned him. "And don't make him throw anythin' at you. Better put on that white coat."

The white coat was white no longer, but Tod donned it, nevertheless. In the deserted officers' cabin, he spread a red cloth over the green baize of the table, and set the fiddle to keep the dishes from falling to the floor. When he came back to the galley, the cook had ready a tray of hot cereal, eggs and bacon, and marmalade. Buttered toast lay under a napkin. At the sight of such food, Tod almost became hungry again. Sufferin' whale oil, what a difference between this and his own chow!

Captain Barry, seated at his table in pajamas, greeted him with a frown. "Where's that nigger?" he snapped as he turned his dark, bearded face to the boy.

"Gone ashore, the cook said, sir." Tod placed his tray on the sideboard and served the cereal.

"Ashore?" the captain growled. With a thick hand, he scratched his chest, where the matted hair showed dark beneath his thin pajama coat.

The master of the *Congo*, the boy noticed, was obvi-

ously nervous. He kept glancing up at an open porthole as though watching for the storm. He pushed the half-eaten bowl of cereal away from him with a furious gesture, then speared a slice of toast. A knock sounded on the door; the second mate entered.

"We're ready to discharge, and no lighter," he announced shortly. "What's wrong with Brixton?"

"That's just what I want to know," barked the captain. He turned with brows drawn together and frowned upon the second officer. "Give him another whistle; if that don't rouse him, we go—see?"

"But the cargo!" remonstrated Mr. Sharp. His long, awkward form seemed to quiver with surprise.

"Toss it overboard! I don't care what ye do with it."

Mr. Sharp's thin face broke into a crafty smile. "Oh, you don't!" He paused and leered. His light blue eyes cast a glance at Tod.

The captain rose in wrath. "Take this breakfast away," he ordered. He strode to his desk in a corner and sank into a chair. Mr. Sharp followed him. "We can afford to wait, sir," he said in a conciliating voice.

Captain Barry turned upon him. "Oh, we can, can we? Well, do ye know anything about hurricane weather or don't ye? Hasn't Sparks had messages warning ships? D'ye see that bank of cloud low toward the southeast? Have ye looked at the barometer? What's that mean?" His voice rose to a high pitch of intensity; his hand shook.

Suddenly he stopped. Tod raised his head. An abrupt pat-pat had sounded on the bulkhead before them, a soft tap as though the carpenter were striking rivets with his hammer. It ceased for a minute, then recommenced. "What the deuce is that?" breathed the captain.

The second officer's face grew pallid. "Shots! Someone's firing at the ship."

"Bilge!" Captain Barry grunted. "Are ye going batty, too?"

Tod turned to the door, but before he could open it, footsteps came rushing down the alleyway, the knob turned, and the figure of a man flung himself into the room. "Cap'n," he cried. "Those devils! They're after me."

"Oh, it's ye, Brixton, is it? What the deuce does this mean?"

Tod gazed at the planter with mounting interest. He was an American of forty years, perhaps; of large build and stout. His round face was unshaven and slightly greasy. His shirt, too, was none too clean. The man was panting, his face pale. "They've turned on me," he snarled at length. "That's what it means. They got hold of your last shipment; so all of them are armed. Then they turn me out—me! After all I've done for them!"

Mr. Sharp gave a mirthless laugh. The planter faced him savagely. "Keep quiet, you fool," he snapped. "When you get out on deck with bullets flying around you, then you'll laugh."

"This is serious?" the little captain asked.

"Serious? Would I be here like this if it wasn't? I had to swim to your ship from the shore near the bush. My house boys are loyal, but the field niggers are lit up with white-eye, and they're on a grand party. They'll be over it in a week, maybe."

"And the cargo?"

"We'll get that out later. I'll go on with you to Porto Rico and get some help. I'll show those devils who's master."

The captain rose. "Get under way, Mr. Sharp. I'll go right up to the bridge."

"Very good, sir."

"Give Mr. Brixton some coffee, boy."

"Yes, sir." Tod poured a cup and placed it on the table. The planter took it with a trembling hand. His lips scowled, his brows contracted. Tod took his tray of dishes and departed.

As soon as he stepped into the alleyway, a swift gust of wind swept by him. He looked at the fore deck in surprise. Great gushes of rain fell as though the heavens had suddenly opened. It hissed and scudded across the deck. Several seamen in glistening oilskins tried in vain to batten down number two hatch. The wind took the canvas from their hands and swept it overboard as though it were a leaf. The noise of the rain on the steel decks was deafening.

Tod turned and entered the galley. "Thanks, Kid," said the cook. "You must be a good mess boy, if the skipper didn't throw anything at you. Did he?"

"No, not yet."

"Then there'll be some pie for you tonight. Don't forget."

Forget? At the mention of that luxurious dessert which he had not glimpsed for months, it seemed, he lost all thought of Brixton. He was almost surprised then to find, when he returned to the saloon to carry out the coffee cups, that the planter now sat there alone. He was leaning on the table, his head in his hands. Tod looked up as footsteps sounded on the inner staircase. Señor Gallardo quickly descended from the wheel house, then paused.

Tod cast a quick, frightened glance at the planter, but he saw that Mr. Brixton was oblivious of the presence of his former partner.

Señor Gallardo took a step into the room. "Good-morning, Brix," he said softly.

At the sound of that voice, the planter started. He lifted his head sharply. His face grew pale.

"You did not expect me," went on Gallardo, his black eyes gleaming; "a little surprise, yes?"

The planter endeavoured to regain his composure. He pushed back his chair and stood up. "Glad to see you, Gally," he returned in a voice none too steady. "How—

how'd you get here?" He held out his hand, but his former partner overlooked it.

"As a passenger on this ship. I was coming to see you in San Felipe." He broke into a little laugh. His sharp profile, turned to Tod, seemed on the instant cruel and rapacious. "But I didn't even find it necessary to land. You were so very kind as to come aboard and join me." There was a menacing tone in his words; his mouth smiled, but his eyes did not join in the mirth.

Mr. Brixton slumped into his chair again with a movement that made Tod think of the wind suddenly going out of a ship's sails.

"And how are things on our island?" Señor Gallardo asked. He advanced to the table and leaned across it, his long hands on the red cloth.

"Bad—bad," the other returned in a low voice. "No prices."

"And the blacks? You still have them well under control?"

Brixton glanced up with a flushed face. "I've been too easy on them. Last month they rose up on Santa Inez and killed the few whites there; that's given our blacks confidence. They're trying to get rid of me now. But I'll get them yet. We'll go to Porto Rico, Gallardo, and get help; then we'll come back and show those blacks."

"You think it safe for me?" Gallardo asked slowly.

"For you? Oh, you mean that little affair before you left? They've forgotten that."

Señor Gallardo leaned forward. His voice lowered. "But I haven't forgotten, Brix—or all your promises either. How about our last shipment?"

The planter cast a quick glance at Tod; the boy turned immediately to the sideboard. Beneath his feet the deck already moved with the first thresh of the propeller. The *Congo* was swinging about in the narrow bay.

"You know I did my best by you," the planter was saying.

Gallardo nodded. He raised his voice as the forward bulkhead, catching the full force of the gale as the *Congo* swung about, echoed to the clamour of wind and rain. "I know just how much you did! But now that you've joined me on this ship, we can settle this at our leisure, eh, Brixton?"

"What do you mean?" The planter was on his feet. "Haven't I handled our shipments as well as I could? You threaten?"

"Do you think a man can play dirt with me and get away with it? With me—Gallardo?" His deep voice rang with the intensity of his words; his slender hands moved along the table. "We'll settle this—at once! You're a coward, Brixton. I know you—" He paused, and his head flew up.

Tod stood as still and upright as a stanchion. Beneath him, a long, ripping roar came from the *Congo*. The propeller jumped spasmodically. Shouts came from the bridge overhead; bells clanged.

"My God, what's happened?" Brixton started for the door.

"No matter what happens," Gallardo returned. "You don't get away from me now."

Tod stepped into the passageway and rushed to the after deck. The violence of the wind flung him against the bulkhead. The rain beat upon the deck and hurled itself against the cabins. What had happened?

The *Congo* rolled heavily to port, then righted herself; the propeller took up its beat with an uneven movement. A quartermaster, oblivious of the rain and wind, leaned out the alleyway door. "Went too near the shore in swinging about," he said loudly. "Listen to that propeller! She's broken."

The chief engineer came running from the engine-room entrance. As the ship rolled, up the slanting deck he

hurried to the windward bulwarks. He swore loudly. "The blamed skipper has sprung the shaft; the screw must be damaged, too. This is a nice fix."

The captain's voice shouted from the bridge. "Can you keep her going, chief?"

"At half speed, yes."

"Half speed?" boomed Captain Barry. "And with this hurricane coming up?"

"Well, you did it, didn't you? Don't blame me, now." An angry oath was carried away by the wind as he vanished aft toward the steering gear.

The *Congo* slowly limped toward the headlands. She plunged across the little bar, rolling low to port. The velocity of the wind increased to a gale that swept every loose rope and tarpaulin from the deck. Tod watched from the alleyway as the forecastle head plunged into a trough of the sea and rose with a sluggish movement. Off the port beam, lightning played about the sea. The sky became as black as night. The howl of the wind, the whine of the ship's rigging, the corkscrew motion of the ship sent a tremor of apprehension through the boy.

"We're in for it now," shouted the quartermaster in Tod's ear. "Don't tell me this ship ain't a jinx. She's laughing at us!"

CHAPTER VIII

A STROKEHOLE RAT

"WILL SHE HOLD TOGETHER IN THIS STORM?"

That was Tod's first thought as he entered the engine room; for it was immediately evident to him that a vital injury had been dealt the shaft or the screw. He dropped down the ladder and, pausing just outside the storeroom door, leaned over the rail. He saw below him the third engineer standing at his station before the telegraph dial with the indicator pointed to *Half Speed Ahead*. The man, with a disquieting glance, was looking aft toward the shaft tunnel, from which came a tremendous thump at each revolution of the propeller. The great iron heart of the *Congo* beat slowly, spasmodically, yet with an exultant whir, as if she revelled in the effect upon officers and crew. There was something almost diabolical in the manner in which she rapped out that thumping accent.

Tod grasped the iron rail for support. The engine-room floor abruptly swung to port with a steady upward movement, the skylight above him tipped to starboard, the grating beneath his feet became a slope that threatened to pitch him headlong into a bulkhead. A shudder went through the vessel as a great sea crashed over her decks.

"That was a big one, eh?" It was the storekeeper standing in the doorway near him, and Tod, glancing over his shoulder, was surprised to see the man surveying him from an unexpected height.

"How long will the storm last?" Tod called out. His voice seemed lost in the thud of the engines and the shriek of the gale outside. The grating shifted again,

and he took this opportunity to dart into the safety of the workshop.

"Nice little hurricane, eh?" shouted the Chilean. "But the Old Man know what to do. We get out of way. This ship no good in storm." Turning, he pointed to the can of kerosene beneath the bench. "You get busy now; you work alone. I lose one wiper."

Tod gave him a quick glance. "You mean Bruce?"

"Yeh, the chief promote that college boy. He's fireman now."

"Fireman!" Tod exclaimed. At once he envisioned Bruce stoking in the sweltering fire room, trying vainly to match his strength against the more experienced hands. "How'd that happen?"

The little Chilean evidently saw something ludicrous in the spectacle. "He promoted! Two men sick this morning. Your frien' get job. If you here, you too."

Tod pondered for a moment. Somehow, he saw another reason back of this change. Did the skipper suspect Bruce of meddling in the ship's affairs, and so take this opportunity of silencing him in the grinding labour of the stokehole? Could Bruce endure that terrific heat, that exhausting drudgery? Tod doubted it.

It was impossible to wipe the gratings this morning; he made his way below and started work on the steel plates near the third engineer's station. Slowly he worked along till he reached the tunnel which led to the fire room. He listened. In his ears were the steady draft of the furnaces, the sharp clang of an iron door, the shrill scrape of a shovel on the flooring. No officer was near. He rose and darted forward into the tunnel.

He came out into the stokehole and looked about. He was in a narrow compartment running across the ship, with a dark bulkhead forward and boilers rising aft. Overhead, a single bulb tried vainly to pierce the enveloping fog of coal dust. Near the port boiler, Swede Jorgenson, stripped to the waist, bent above his pile of coal.

Before an open furnace door of the centre boiler Topsy was thrusting a long slice bar into the glowing clinker. Tod was amazed at the dexterity of the little cockney as he thrust, stepped aside, and pushed the bar. The flames flickered over his glistening body where the muscles rippled beneath the skin.

Tod turned as a shovel scraped the floor behind him. Bruce had flung it to the coal pile lying beneath the open bunker chute. Then he wearily stepped to the bucket of water that hung upon the bulkhead and lifted it down.

"Blimey, stop that!" Topsy shrilled behind them.

Bruce ignored the words. "Hello, Tod," he said, a smile endeavouring to form on his moist, blackened face. "That little cockroach thinks he's the boss of this fire room." He plunged his dry lips into the water.

On the instant, Topsy's lean body flashed past Tod, and the bucket was knocked from Bruce's grasp. It clattered to the floor, where the water hissed faintly as it fell into the bilge below the hot plates. "You drink too bloomin' much," Topsy cried with venomous fervour. "You don't know nothin'. Want ter be sick? Then I'll 'ave ter work all three watches. Strike me bline if I don't feel like 'ittin' yer over the 'ead with a slice bar!"

Bruce stuttered with rage. At length he pulled himself together and said to Tod, "Get me some water, will you, old chap? I've got to drink or I can't work."

"How are your fires going?" Tod quickly asked.

"Rotten. This is my idea of hell. I don't see how the men stand it."

Tod reached for the bucket as the chief engineer entered. The man surveyed the gauges, then whirled upon the firemen with a voice of thunder. "Lookit that gauge! Steam's down twelve points. Git busy, you rats! The Old Man wants to put on full speed." He gazed at Bruce with an angry eye. "You're a poor excuse for a fireman, aren't you?"

"Did I ask to be put here?" Bruce retorted.

"Well, don't you want to be promoted? You might get to be oiler some day—though I doubt it." Suddenly he perceived Tod. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm getting water for the men, sir."

"Then get it quick, and drag your feet outa here, see?"

"Yes, sir." Tod stooped for the tunnel and made his way through the engine room and up the ladders to the starboard alleyway. When he returned with the water, he found Bruce leaning exhausted on his shovel.

"That college bloke's fixed hisself," Topsy snarled. "Ain't 'e a nice sight now? 'E drunk too much bloomin' water, that's wot's wrong."

Bruce's chest heaved, his breath came in sobbing gasps. His shoulders moved convulsively.

"Maybe you work too fast," Tod encouraged.

"Yah—yah. He work fast!" Swede Jorgenson's deep voice boomed out in mirth.

"I 'ope the bloke dies," Topsy remarked consolingly, as he slammed shut a furnace door. "'E keeps the dust flyin' roun' an' chokes us."

Bruce swayed against the bulkhead. From the ventilator above him, a swift rush of air descended. In its draught the youth shook with a sudden chill. Tod hung the water bucket on its hook where it swung back and forth with the motion of the ship. "Here, Bruce," Tod urgently whispered, "I'll take your place for a while. You rest."

"No—I'm all right." Bruce went unsteadily across to the coal pile and picked up his shovel. Throwing open a door of number two furnace, he threw several shovel-fuls into the yawning mouth. The flames leaped hungrily outward. Tod stepped back, putting up his hand to ward off that scorching heat. He saw at a glance that the fire was in no condition for more fuel; it needed shaking down—five minutes work with the slice bar.

The deep voice of the chief engineer roared out be-

hind them, "More steam, you men! She's going full speed now." The chief came down the sloping plates and grasped Bruce by the arm. "Git busy! D' you want me to throw you into the fire box?"

The youth did not reply. He swung open another furnace door, and the firelight splashed like spilled blood on the bulkhead. For an instant he swayed in the ruddy glare. His face was pale and drawn in agony; his limbs trembled. Abruptly he crumpled to the floor, his breath coming in laboured gasps.

"You filthy rat!" shrieked the chief in rage. "It was your flunkey who whined to the skipper about work, wasn't it? He was right—you can't even stoke a furnace."

Bruce rose on one elbow. "I'm all right," he stammered; "I'm all right."

"You're weak as a baby. Get out o' this!" The chief shoved the boy with his foot.

"Let me stoke," Tod interrupted. "I've done it before. I know how."

The chief gave him a quick glance. "All right. Get busy." He swung on his heel and vanished into the engine room.

Tod helped his friend into the tunnel that led forward to the dim region of the bunkers. "Stay here," he counselled; "don't mind that bird. You'll be O. K. pretty soon."

In a moment, he had stepped back to the furnace and, picking up a long slice bar, thrust it into the glowing clinker. The draught roared. The heat shot forth from the fiery mouth as though endeavouring to devour everything within its reach. Tod's breath came faster; sweat poured from his body. He broke up the mass of coals and shook down the grate; then he flung new fuel upon the flat surface. When he had closed the door again, he rested a moment to get his breath. His burning gaze fastened upon the water bucket. A drink? He didn't dare. He moistened his cracked lips with his tongue.

"Bruce ought to be in his bunk," he presently shouted to Toppy.

The little Londoner threw open a furnace door. "Let 'im alone. You can't 'elp 'im now. Steam's goin' up too slow."

Tod turned again to his work. Soon he felt a burning throb at the back of his head. His eyes were seared by the heat, his throat choked on the dust; the floor, lifting and falling beneath him, sent a sickening sensation into the pit of his stomach. But when he glanced up at the gauge, his heart leaped. The steam was going up! He watched its slow rise with a sense of elation.

Above the roar about him, above the whistle of the gale outside, he heard a low rumble forward. He paused and listened.

"Blimey, wot's that?"

The floor slanted to starboard, but it did not sway back again. "The bloomin' cargo!" Toppy shrilled. "It's shiftin' in the for'ard 'old!"

Tod's heart missed a beat. With the shaft disabled, in full flight from the centre of the hurricane, the *Congo* had shifted her cargo. Great shudders went through the ship as a sea crashed over the decks. Tod, casting a glance at Toppy, met the widened gaze of the little fireman. Fear, cold and deadly, had flashed through him; too. Was this the end?

"It ain't so bad," the Swede called across to them. "I seen that happen before."

Without a word, they went back to their stoking. Tod soon discovered that his pile of coal was exhausted. "We ain't got no trimmer on this watch," Toppy informed him. "You get busy in the bloomin' bunkers fer half an' hour an' I'll watch yer fires. If anything 'appens, I'll call yer."

Tod stopped near Bruce where he sat with his back against a bulkhead of the bunker entrance. "I'm feeling

better," Bruce said, with a wan smile. "I'll be a wiser stoker after this."

With a cheery word thrown over his shoulder, Tod swung up the incline into the darkness. Above him the bunkers loomed dim and eerie. An electric bulb on a long cord glowed sombrely from a wooden partition. He carefully made his way round the coal chute, picked up an iron wheelbarrow, and steered it down the narrow alleyway to the port bunkers which were now being drawn. The walls of coal muffled the sounds from the stokehole. As he quickly filled his barrow, the dust rose like a black mist about him. He guided his load round to the chute, and dumped it down to the stokers. He had made three trips when he heard a step on the iron plates behind him. He whirled. The second mate was coming up the incline.

Tod watched him go forward to a small watertight door in the bulkhead which separated the bunkers from number two hold. He pulled down the iron handle and swung the door open. Tod gazed over the man's shoulder. Immediately, the clatter of wooden cases struck his ears. At each movement of the ship, the cargo swung to starboard, wedging itself beneath the deck. The list of the floor increased. Mr. Sharp swore loudly as he closed the door again.

"Ain't that the jinx for yuh?" he confided to Tod with a bitter smile. "We daren't put the men in there to straighten it during this storm. It'd kill them."

With relief, Tod noted that the man was angry rather than fearful. "It's not so bad, then?" he asked, gathering courage.

"Bad? It couldn't be worse." Of a sudden, the man lowered his voice. "Say, is that sick kid down there your friend?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Sharp came closer to the boy; his thin, sallow face bent over him. "Then tell him to be careful how he butts

in on the Old Man's affairs, see? We know who he is."

Tod started. They were aware that Bruce was the son of the owner, then! How had they found out?

"Yeh," continued Mr. Sharp, "tell that kid he might find out something he won't want to know. Get me?"

Tod looked up quickly and met the man's steady gaze. "All right," Tod replied; "I'll tell him."

"The chief says you'd better stay here as fireman and let your friend be mess boy. Of course, he don't want to work the owner's son too hard."

"Yes, sir."

The boy remained gazing after the second mate's lean figure until he had swung down the incline and vanished up the fiddley ladder. He returned then to his work in the bunkers, but his mind was fixed upon this strange new development. What had the man meant? Bruce might find out something he wouldn't want to know! Not a threat; merely a statement. And though he did not put much faith in the second mate, he had to admit that the man spoke in an assured tone that was disconcerting. Should he tell Bruce?

Toppy's voice broke in on his meditation. "Hurry up, Joe Macaroni," he called. "You gotta clean out the ash pits. The end o' the watch is nearly 'ere."

The end of the watch! He was mighty glad of that. Shooting his last barrow of coal down to the fire room he walked down the incline of the tunnel. Bruce blocked his way.

"How am I going to repay you, old top? I'll be all right for the night watch, though."

"You're not going on watch tonight. Mr. Sharp just told me that you were to be mess boy."

"Mess boy!"

"Yes; he said the Old Man didn't want to work the owner's son too hard."

Bruce paled as he clutched Tod's arm. "They know?"

Tod nodded. "I don't understand what he means. He

said to tell you not to find out too much about this old tramp; you might be sorry to learn things."

"Sorry! What's he mean? Is he trying to make me believe my father is back of their dirty work? Oh, that's like them. But I won't be frightened, I tell you. I won't stop—I'll get at the truth yet."

"That's the idea," Tod said quickly. "They're afraid, themselves."

As he passed on to the ash bucket, his thoughts were occupied with the second mate's warning. Was the man afraid? That was not the impression Tod had received. Rather did Mr. Sharp appear to be making a statement in which he implicitly believed. The boy recalled the tone of sincerity, the very words themselves: *Tell that kid he might find out something he won't want to know.* That didn't necessarily incriminate Bruce's father—that was inconceivable. At what, then, was the man hinting? What did he mean?

CHAPTER IX

S O S

WHEN THE BLACK GANG FILED INTO THE MESS ROOM THAT EVENING, they were at once aware of the increasing fury of the hurricane. Every porthole was clamped shut; electric lights burned in the deckhead. The men ate in silence, not attempting to raise their voices above the tumult of the wind-driven sea. Several seamen who were caught in their forecabin were absent; they did not dare endeavour to make their way aft with the waves breaking every moment over the bulwarks and flooding the fore deck with a whirling mass of water.

"She won't never make port," Toppo announced. "The bloomin' tub'll go ter pieces."

"Yah, cheer us up," Swede Jorgenson grumbled as he took a mouthful of corned beef. "Ain't this grub bad enough for yuh?"

Toppo scowled across the table. "It don't make no difference, Squarehead," he retorted. "This 'ere is the larst meal you'll ever eat." Reaching for a slice of bread, he stopped in surprise as the plate slid gently toward the seamen's end of the table.

Abruptly the men glanced up. The ship trembled under the impact of a tremendous blow. The crash of water on the forward deck was like the thunderous beat of a windward surf. Its deafening roar enveloped their little world with vibrations that pressed against their ear drums. They glanced down at the table with a muttered curse or a whispered prayer.

Tod nervously rose and touched Bruce's arm. "Come on," he urged. "I'll show you what to do in the officers' cabin."

They stepped into the alleyway and closed the door sharply behind them. At once they were caught by a gust of wind that threatened to carry them aft to the wave-swept deck. They clung to each other for support. The *Congo* pitched heavily; her starboard beam buried itself in an immense sea. Spume flew like shot down the alleyway. Water hissed and curled about their feet.

"Hurry!" Tod shouted. He pulled at the iron cleat of the galley door, and they darted within.

The cook turned an ashen face to them. "Kinda bad eh?" he muttered in a futile effort to be cheerful. "Better git some chow into the cabin. The officers 'll be needin' it. I've put it in these buckets for you."

"Does a mess boy wear a white coat?" Bruce grinned. "You know, old bean, I want to be a success in this new rôle."

"Success!" yelled the cook. "You'll be success enough if yuh git the chow in there without drowning it in salt water. Beat it, now!" He thrust a coffeepot at Tod and two swinging pails at Bruce.

Once more they navigated the narrow alleyway. Tod swung open the cabin door, stepped across the brass-shod storm step, and as Bruce slipped in behind him, fought with the wind to close it again.

They had set the fiddle around the table, when an inner door opened and Mr. Brixton appeared. "Worst hurricane I ever saw," the planter announced in a loud and slightly tremulous voice. "Sorry I ever left San Felipe."

"We'll have dinner ready in a minute," said Bruce.

"Don't fix it for me," he answered, and Tod perceived that the man's sallow face was paler than usual. "I'm not hungry. Gallardo is sick in his berth." With a sigh he sank into the chair before the desk. "Captain Barry wants his chow brought up to the wheel house. He won't leave the bridge."

"Yes, sir." Tod picked up the coffee and turned toward the little inner stairs that led upward.

As they climbed in the darkness, another mighty wave struck the *Congo* a terrific blow. The ship quivered beneath the impact of tons of falling water. The two youths frantically braced themselves against the walls of the narrow stairway to keep from falling; then, after a long unbearable moment, as the ship rose again, they crept upward. They came out in the chart room, and Tod, glancing at the chronometer on the wall, saw that the hands pointed to five-thirty. For eight hours they had been fleeing from the centre of the hurricane. Eight hours! It seemed more like eternity.

Without mishap they ascended another flight of stairs to the wheel house. Here, on the Olympian heights of the bridge, Tod paused and looked about him. The quartermaster stood at the helm with feet braced; in the faint glow of the binnacle light, his weather-beaten face seemed drawn and tired from the burden of his constant watchfulness; his eyes peered out the window before him at the dim outlines of the *Congo's* forecastle head. As the ship rose on a wave, then plunged, he took a spoke, easing the wheel. Before the telegraph dial with its indicator pointed to *Half Speed Ahead* stood the second mate, his tall form swathed in oilskins.

"We've brought the grub," Tod announced.

"Good." Mr. Sharp glanced at them over his shoulder. His light blue eyes shone with a friendly gleam. "Fix me a sandwich and a cup of coffee. No time for anything else. The cap'n's on the bridge outside—in the port wing. One of you guys better call him."

"Yes, sir." Tod placed the coffee pot upon the floor, and stepped to the door. He swung it open, and at once the little wheel house was filled with the clamour of the storm. Hurriedly flinging the door shut behind him, he found himself on the open bridge, facing the fury of the elements.

The velocity of the gale sent him lurching against the rail, where he grasped a stanchion for support. Wide-eyed he gazed down from the height of the strange darkness that hung over the sea. Through the beating rain that pressed his clothes against his wet body, he discerned a huge wave loom up ahead. It bore down upon the ship with incredible swiftness. The *Congo's* fore-castle head did not rise; she plunged into that mountainous sea as though welcoming the terror her sluggish movements struck into the hearts of those who commanded her. With a crash like thunder, the wave broke over the bows and plunged down upon the deck. Spin-drift enveloped the bridge in a ghostly screen. The ship's fore deck completely vanished. All that remained was the black sea with white crests that the wind whipped into stinging spray.

Blinded by the wind and the salt water, Tod loosed one hand to wipe his eyes. Slowly he felt the deck lift beneath him. His heart rose too. He turned to the left and pulled himself up the slanting deck to the canvas shelter of the port wing.

There in the wan glow of the red light, Captain Barry's small form was dimly seen, his oilskins dripping, his sou'wester pulled low over his bearded face. He gazed over the wind-dodger into the blackness ahead. He started as Tod touched his arm.

"Grub—in the wheel house!" Tod shouted above the drumming of the seas. "Mr. Sharp—said to call you!"

The captain's answer was lost in the hum of the gale. He started down the slant toward the wheel house, then paused and grasped the rail. "Look out!" he shouted. "Hold tight!"

Beneath them the deck sank with sickening suddenness. Tod's hands closed on the rail. He felt the captain's arm thrown around him, heard the rush of water in his ears. His heart missed a beat. They were enveloped in a mass of whirling, tossing water that hissed and howled

as it fled past them toward the boat deck. The boy lost his footing; his viselike grip on the rail was torn loose. Involuntarily, he opened his mouth to cry out, and at once his throat smarted with salt brine. But an arm held him, an arm as strong as steel. The water receded, the drumming in his ears became only a distant ringing. Captain Barry held him tight against the rail till the bridge once more swung clear.

"Get inside!" he yelled.

In a daze Tod slid down the slant to the door. Pulling it open with all his strength, he stumbled over the storm step to the sanctuary of the wheel house.

Behind him the captain let the door slam shut. Tod staggered against the after wall. He saw the captain toss his sou'wester to the floor. "Coffee," grunted the master of the *Congo*.

Bruce handed him a cup, and he drank the steaming liquid without a word.

The second mate swung about from the speaking tube. He lifted his voice. "The chief is havin' trouble again. One o' the bearings. The shaft can't stand this strain."

"She's got to!" Captain Barry shouted. "A half hour more and we'll be out of this. A half hour more." His words were almost a prayer.

"We're making no headway, sir," Mr. Sharp went on. "We can't be far from San Felipe. If we're driven on that coast—with these natives—" He stopped at the look of cold fury that spread over Captain Barry's face.

The master clenched his fists. "San Felipe!" he echoed in a voice that vibrated through the little wheel house, "that's the cause of all our trouble. The owner gives us orders to put in there when it's miles out of our course. I was a fool to go in with him on this. Harvey Denton! That's the man—sitting back home, safe in his little office. What's he care about us!"

Abruptly he stopped and peered at Bruce. In the dim light of the binnacle, Tod saw his eyes close till they

were mere slits in his dark countenance; he thrust his beard forward at the youth until Bruce recoiled against the wall. "Does yer father know ye're aboard this tub?"

Bruce's slim body swayed to the lurch of the ship; on the instant his face went pale. "No—no, he doesn't."

A low laugh came from the captain's lips that chilled Tod's blood. "Serves him right, then," Captain Barry boomed. "Ye thought ye was learning things here, didn't ye? Ye never thought as how yer father was behind all this. Yeh"—his voice rose to a shrill note—"he's the one that cooked up this little game—damn him!"

"You lie!" Bruce challenged in a suppressed tone. "You can't make me believe that."

"Oh, can't I?" the captain boomed. "Why, even the blacks on San Felipe know he's back o' this. Even Black Jean knows that. Get out o' here. I can't stand the sight o' yer. Get out!"

Tod touched Bruce's quivering form. "Let's go below."

Bruce shook off his hand. "No—no!" The next moment Tod saw his anger vanish. Beneath their feet the deck's regular vibration stopped. This instant cessation struck terror to their little world.

"Good God! What's wrong now?" blurted Mr. Sharp. His thin body trembled. But Captain Barry had sprung forward to the speaking tube. He put his lips to it, blew. "What's wrong? Get those engines going! It's our only chance."

The *Congo* lost headway; she rolled slowly in a trough of the sea. "Put the helm down hard," the captain ordered. Then into the tube: "What! . . . The bearings? . . . Shaft? Ye got to git it going—quick."

Tod stood spellbound. He was aware that the ship was swinging round, that every second the deck was listing more to starboard.

The captain turned. "Get word to Sparks," he shouted.

"He can't hear a word through the tube. Have him send out an S O S for help."

For help! Tod quivered at the words. The *Congo* had lost the fight, then. Lost? . . . Suddenly over him swept the conviction that the *Congo* had won. This was what she had fought for. This was the answer to his challenge of defiance. The ship, that sinister personality which seemed in accord with all the dark elements about them, was exultantly flinging herself into the hurricane. These puny men had sought to master her. Master the *Congo*? Why, she was as old as the world; all the dark secrets of the past were hidden within her holds. These men were mere puppets at her mercy. She would drag them down into the depths of the sea; she would go home at last, go home to those bleak caverns where strange monsters swam, where strange seaweeds swayed in the darkness.

"Get word to Sparks—quick!"

Mechanically, Tod turned to obey. He opened the door leading down to the boat deck. At the top of the little steps he hesitated, his hands clinging to the rail. Someone closed the door behind him, and he was left in this outer world of sound and fury.

He could vaguely make out the black funnel rising amidships, and just back of this a single light gleaming from the porthole of the radio shack. To each side rose the dark outlines of the officers' cabins, and forward of these the two lifeboats on their davits. Even as Tod took this in at a glance, a light flashed out on the dark deck as the wireless door swung open. The figure of the radio operator stood for a second in the glare, then the door closed. Sparks was making his way toward the wheel house.

The *Congo* swung slowly to port. Tod, casting a glance at the sea, saw a mountainous wave bearing down upon them. He lifted his voice in a shout: "Sparks, watch out!"

Too late the radio operator saw his danger. Even as he ran forward along the slanting deck, the wave struck.

It rose and engulfed him in a tremendous flood of water. Tod saw the port lifeboat lifted from its cradle and flung to starboard. It pitched against the second lifeboat with a crash of breaking timbers. Tod clung with all his strength to the rail. The water hurled its weight against him as though a hundred sinuous arms were trying to tear loose his hold and drag him into the sea. He felt the deck slowly lift. Spume flew into his eyes, his nose, his mouth. Then a scream, high and terror-stricken, stabbed into his mind like a knife thrust. Sparks—Sparks!

The water slid hissing overside; the deck took form again. The port lifeboat was gone—and with it, Sparks of the wireless.

Tod turned and flung open the door behind him. "Sparks is carried overboard!" he gasped. "The port lifeboat, too!"

The captain raised his voice in a curse. "We'll all be gone if we don't send out word. Do either of you boys understand radio?"

Bruce shook his head; but Tod nodded as in a dream. "I know a little—perhaps I could do it. I had a radio outfit at home. But Sparks?"

"He's gone. We can do nothing. Send out an S O S. It's our only chance." He flung open the door to the boat deck. "Watch your chance—then run for it."

The boy flung himself down the steps. With a quick glance to right and left, he slid down the deck past the funnel to the radio shack. When the door slammed shut behind him, he turned to the table with quickened heartbeats.

Throwing himself into the chair before the receiver, he took in at a glance the large battery charging panel with the switches open. The antennæ throw-switch, he noted, was on. Yes, the transmitter was ready to send. With trembling fingers he placed the receivers over his ears, and listened. No code came through the night.

He placed his finger on the key. He must remember all he'd ever known. What was the code? He couldn't think; a fog enveloped his mind.

A question brought him up sharply, tense and vibrant; what was the position of the ship? Why hadn't he asked the skipper? But surely Sparks had their position in such a hurricane. His hand closed on a notebook on the desk. Here it was—the position at 7 P. M.

Now to remember the code! He couldn't think—his mind was a blank. A tremulous shiver passed through him. He had completely forgotten.

By thunder, this wouldn't do! Pulling himself together with a mighty effort, he held up his hand. In surprise he saw that it was steady. But the code—the code! Just a little thing—to remember. Why hadn't he studied more at that little radio set at home in his room? He had sent out code messages then, sent them with ease, imagining that he was an operator at sea. And now he was. The lives of thirty men depended upon him—and the code wouldn't come! He closed his eyes. He saw himself back at home, sitting at his little instrument, tapping out the playful words to a schoolmate a few blocks away at another amateur set. *I got your message all right. Pretty poor though. Try again.*

He sat up with a start. He had sent that message winging its way into the hurricane. He had it—he had it! The code was at his finger tips.

He leaned over the key, his wet hair clinging to his forehead. His eyes burned with intensity as his fingers tapped upon the key. Three dots—three dashes—three dots.

S O S—S O S—S O S. S.S. Congo—Congo—Congo Position: Lat. 16° 37'N; long. 70° 4'W.

With his heart pounding in his throat, he waited. Had a ship heard? Would there be a cargo liner swinging north from Martinique, or an interisland freighter bound west for Jamaica? No reply came through the ear re-

ceivers. From the manner in which the deck beneath him altered its slant every minute, he knew that the ship was wallowing in a trough of the sea. Another great wave might overwhelm them at any moment. Even the radio shack might be carried away. Before that happened, he must get his message across.

S O S—S O S—S O S. *S.S. Congo—Congo—Congo*. With a slow tap, he sent out the code again. Would a reply come? And if it did, would he be able to take down the answer? Then, as his fingers pressed the key, a sharp buzz, irregular yet rhythmic, sounded in his ears. His heart leaped. A reply!

He gripped a pencil and wrote. The words came swiftly: *K N R Z—K N R Z—K N R Z*. What in the world was that?

Tod's eyes lighted upon the radio call book near his hand. Hurriedly opening it, he ran his fingers down the list. Here it was: *K N R Z: West Montara*.

The *S. S. West Montara* was answering. Again came the sharp rasp in the ear receivers: *K N R Z. What trouble? Give details*.

Tod's fingers rapped out the code. *S. S. Congo—disabled—need—assistance—drifting—toward—San—Felipe—Position: Lat. 16° 37' N; long. 70° 4' W*.

He stopped. Silence in his ears. Had they got his position? The minutes crept by. No answer. Sweat broke out on his brow. Had something happened to his radio set? Had the aerial fallen, struck by a monstrous wave?

On a sudden, he raised his head. Into his mind had swept the conviction that the *Congo* was fighting him. Did this vicious tramp steamer know that he was sending for help? Was that scream of the wind around the radio shack only the mocking laughter of the ship? The pounding of the waves on deck overwhelmed him with terror. He pressed his hands together till the knuckles showed white. A low, harsh laugh escaped his lips. Why, he was getting as superstitious as Toppy, believing in all

these jinx stories, believing the *Congo*, herself, could interfere with these radio messages. He wouldn't allow himself to be caught that way! Something was wrong with the set.

His burning eyes surveyed the apparatus before him. To his unaccustomed gaze, everything appeared in place. His glance focussed upon the 'phone cord. In a stirring instant, he saw that one of the 'phone tips had slipped from the jack. That was the trouble! Swiftly he reached forward and slid the tip in again.

As he listened, his heart slowly sank. Silence. The *West Montara* hadn't heard. His fingers dropped to the key. S O S—S O S—S O S.

And then a rasp in his ears! With steady hand he grasped the pencil. Out of the night that had gone mad, out of that furious clamour of wind and wave, came the reply—one word:

Coming.



CHAPTER X

TRIUMPH OF THE JINX

THE WEST MONTARA WAS COMING. HOW TOD'S HEART LEAPED AT THE thought! So intent was he upon those winged words that he swung about with a sudden start when Bruce Denton touched his arm.

"Did you make it?" Bruce asked in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Yes—got the *West Montara*. She's coming. Tell the captain. I'll stay here and keep in touch."

"Where is she?"

"Don't know yet. I'll get them again while you're gone."

Bruce flung open the door, and at once the full clamour of the storm forced itself into the cabin. "Watch your step," Tod called. "Take your time."

A cheery shout answered him. "Sure I'll be careful. I run from one ventilator to another and grab the handles. It's not so bad. The Old Man says the worst is over." Bruce flung himself into the night.

The worst was over? Tod suspected that Bruce meant only the hurricane. What of the *Congo*? Didn't his friend realize that the ship would not give up the battle this

easily? True, they had scored a point; but this dark mysterious vessel whose inhospitable decks they trod had other forces at her command, forces which she only awaited an opportunity to use. In vain the boy tried to throw off that sense of foreboding that oppressed him. Those dark Furies that beat their scrawny wings about the walls of the radio shack were not to be ignored. They were too close; they encompassed one with their shrieks, satanic and appalling.

As he bent over the key in his swift effort to get in touch with the *West Montara* again, he recalled with a sharp feeling of irony all those rosy dreams which he had brought aboard ship with him in New York. Where were his tropic isles of the Caribbees? They still rose on the far horizon like a mirage, and like a mirage they vanished as the ship drew near. It seemed to him that the *Congo*, in sailing south, was taking him upon more lonely seas than he had ever adventured on before. This strange voyage had increased, extended his perception until his mind was groping along the misty edge of a world that was utterly unknown to him and utterly black. This new sense of awareness gave him understanding of the *Congo*; he knew what he was up against that night.

A rasp in his ears focussed his attention upon the receivers. *K N R Z—K N R Z*. He had them! Quickly he tapped out the message: *Where are you?*

He took down the reply: *One hundred miles to west of you. Making slow progress. Can you hold out till morning?*

The words were written upon the little pad before the full import of their meaning struck him. Hold out till morning? Why, the night had only commenced! In that cold immensity of wind and wave, could the *Congo* stay afloat till dawn? He trembled at the thought.

When Bruce returned, dripping yet jubilant, Tod gave him the message without comment. "What!" Bruce blurted out in consternation. "Till morning?"

"Ask the skipper what to reply."

"What can he say? Good heavens, that'll be too late. There is only one lifeboat left, and the skipper's gig on the poop. We can't get off in them—even if we tried, they wouldn't float in this sea."

Tod spoke in a weary voice. "Ask him what to say."

"Gosh, old chap, keep up your spirits. What's got into you? Better find some dry clothes.—All right, I'm going."

Once more the boy was alone. The night wore on. He sent out his steady calls; but for several hours he received no reply. The rain finally ceased. The wind, however, still howled about the cabin, the waves pounded over the decks below, and the spume flew like shot against the portholes. At length, near midnight, when a precipitous slant of the deck sent his chair scudding along the floor, he heard the unmistakable sound of a message in his ears. With an effort he stood before the table, automatically writing the words. *K N R Z Congo—Congo. Can't make it. Captain must turn about and face storm. Cross sea giving us trouble. Will try to get in touch with Point Maisi station.*

Slowly he wrote the final word. He wasn't surprised, he told himself. He had expected as much. For the *West Montara* was probably no larger than the *Congo*; and how could either of them hope to battle this hurricane which beat its destructive way north toward the Gulf?

A second later another rasp: *How are you making it? Try to—* The message stopped. What had gone wrong? Tod looked up, and immediately he was aware that lightning flashed about the deck. The two portholes facing him blazed with a steady running firelight that burned upon the deck. Had the ship been struck by lightning? Had fire started?

As he turned from the table, Bruce flung himself into the cabin. "The foremast just went overside," he cried. "Carried the aërial away. The wire hit the funnel."

Tod quivered. So the battle had been resumed! In

that stirring instant he knew that his dread foreboding had been correct; but he also knew that all fear had fled from his body. He was ready to fight with all his strength and will, fight to the bitter end. Not without a struggle would the *Congo* win this round.

"Turn off the juice!" Bruce shouted. "The aërial might hit someone on the bridge."

Tod leaped to the switch and jerked it down, and at once the sparkling light on deck flashed out. Then, turning to face his friend, he said in a steady voice, "The *West Montara* can't make it. She's had to give it up."

Speechless, Bruce met his gaze.

"We'd better tell the captain," Tod went on in his level tone. "We can't do anything more here."

Bruce Denton lurched down the pitching floor. His voice, when he spoke, was low and vibrant. "I'm glad, Tod—glad! I hope this jinx ship goes down."

At the words, so strange and unexpected, Tod contemplated his friend in amazement. He perceived that the youth's nerves were taut to the breaking point. Bruce's mouth twitched in agitation; he raised a pair of bleak, stricken eyes that stirred Tod to the very depths.

"I'm beginning to understand," Bruce said slowly. "Topsy is right—this ship brings trouble to everyone connected with it."

Tod stepped forward and grasped his friend's arm. "What's happened? Has Mr. Sharp been telling more lies?"

"Lies? I'm not so sure. You have to believe proof, don't you—when you see it yourself?"

"Believe nothing! Are we sure of anyone on this ship? Brace up! Come on—we'll report to the bridge."

Without a further word, they went on deck. Through the encompassing blackness, a dim light greeted them from the wheel-house window. That was the only bit of their little world that remained. All else was a turmoil of sound and fury, a whirl and hiss of a thousand

wings that beat in the night about them. With relief, Tod felt a hand touch his shoulder. "Follow me," cried Bruce in his ear. "Now run!"

Swaying to meet the roll of the deck, they darted forward to a cabin ventilator, grasped its handle for a moment, then ran on to the larger stokehold ventilator. A second later they reached the steps of the wheel house. Tod sprang to the door, flung it open, and met the anxious gaze of Captain Barry.

"Well," snapped the little master. "What now?"

Tod choked on the words that refused to come through his tightened throat.

"Well?" repeated the captain.

"The *West Montara* can't make it, sir," the boy uttered at last. "Had to give it up."

Captain Barry continued gazing at him. His bearded face was as inscrutable as a mask. Mechanically he buttoned his oilskins. A snarl escaped from Mr. Sharp's lips where he stood at the wheel with the quartermaster.

Captain Barry nodded slowly. "Most vessels would have trouble in this hurricane. What chance have we now!" He said the last words so low that the boy barely caught them.

"And the radio gone," muttered the second mate in a fury. "We're drifting right toward the islands. What'll we do?"

"Do?" thundered the master of the *Congo*. "We'll fight—that's what we'll do! Order every man to put on his life belt! You boys stay here; I can send you below with messages." As he turned to the forward window, he suddenly lifted his head. "What's that? Do you hear a new noise, quartermaster?"

The old seaman at the helm shook his head. "Only the wind, sir, and the waves pounding on deck."

Captain Barry flung open the door to the bridge. The wind swept in with a triumphant snarl. Tod, stepping to the doorway, discerned the captain peering over the

canvas of the starboard wing. Instantly Tod knew. His terrified heart thumped madly. The impression seized him that this was what the *Congo* desired. For above the whine of wind, above the bellow of the waves, came the sullen rumble of a windward surf.

Tod stumbled to the bridge rail. Grasping a stanchion for support, he strained his eyes into the blackness. Again came the sound—a low thunderous roar as the waves crashed and broke against an approaching shore.

To his own surprise, he felt the hot blood surge into his face; he found his lips opening to voice his cry: "Fight—fight!"

Even as he spun about, Captain Barry's figure blocked the wheel-house door. "Mr. Sharp," he commanded, "get ready the forward anchor. We've got one chance—that it holds."

One chance! Tod lurched up the deck to the wheel house. How could he help—how could he help! Captain Barry was already hurling an order at Bruce. "Find the third officer for me, Denton! Tell him to get ready the spare anchor that's aft by the firemen's quarters. When I blow one whistle, he's to drop it. Hurry!"

Tod stooped to the locker in one corner and pulled out the life belts just as Mr. Brixton emerged hurriedly from the little stairway. The planter's mouth twitched; his eyes searched the captain's face as though hoping for a look of encouragement. "Are we lost?" he stammered.

"Here's a life belt for you," Tod called out. The planter took it eagerly. The boy slipped into one himself, strapped the belt about his waist, and tied the cords over his shoulders. A moment later, he stepped out again to the bridge. If the ship was to be knocked to pieces on the rocks, he preferred the open deck. Sliding down the slant to the starboard wing, he peered over the wind-dodger into the night.

Presently he became aware of a figure moving up be-

side him. "Have we got a chance?" shouted the voice of the planter.

Tod mumbled a reply. It seemed to him that the waves that dashed over the port beam and pounded across the fore deck had lost their former violence. No longer did mountainous seas envelop the ship from stem to stern in a haze of flying spray. In place of that came this new, more deadly rumble of a surf drawing nearer, ever nearer.

Leaning far over the rail, he glimpsed the seamen running across the deck toward the forecastle head. In that inferno of tossing water, they yet dared brave the Furies.

The captain crossed to the whistle lever and leaned upon it. A loud blare shrilled high above the din of breaking seas. Tod felt a tightening of his heart. Now the anchor chain was slipping through the hawse pipe into the water. Would it hold? Was the spare anchor sliding downward, too? Still as death, he waited. A tremor went through the ship as the anchor caught behind them. Then she swayed on again. The anchor was dragging—dragging.

He heard the captain's voice booming into the darkness; but his words were lost in the last whine of the wind. The deck gave an abrupt jerk; the ship rolled heavily to port. With a sullen movement, the *Congo* swung about.

At his side Tod heard the planter cry out with sudden feeling.

"What's the matter?" Tod called. "The anchors are holding. The gale's falling off. We're safe for the present."

"It isn't that," Mr. Brixton shouted in reply. "I'm afraid I'm lost anyway. What if this should be San Felipe? The natives——"

His voice was lost in a sudden rising hum of the gale. Then that was past, and only the low roar of the surf

was heard. A quick flash of lightning shot through the scene. In that instant, Tod took in a half circle of bay about them, a jungle crowding down to the very shore, a line of hills in the distance. In another swift flash, he glimpsed the planter's face. It was drawn, pale, and terrified. Although the man uttered no word, Tod knew that he had recognized his island.

Disabled, battered by the sea, the *Congo* had drifted on to San Felipe.

PART THREE

VOODOO ISLAND

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Wireless Report

8pm July 10

**Congo—N. Y. for Caribbean ports. 98 miles
south of Haiti.**

New York Times

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CHAPTER I

DISABLED

THE TENSITY OF THE MEN'S FEARS RELAXED WHEN THEY KNEW THAT THE anchor cables held. Drugged though they were by weariness, they were allowed no rest, for the captain and chief engineer, making a hurried inspection in the darkness before dawn, found an appalling amount of damage wrought by the hurricane, which had swung past them toward the Gulf.

Under the vigilant eyes of the boatswain, the seamen were set to work clearing the decks of the wreckage. Every member of the Black Gang was ordered below. The oilers worked with the chief on the shaft and the bearings, the firemen with the second engineer on the firebox of number two boiler which had crumpled during the night. Until the sombre dawn appeared, Tod lowered bricks and boiler lining down the fiddley by gin block

and rope, then he went below and crawled into the fire box to assist the Chilean storekeeper build up the sides.

It was evident to the crew that the ship would not be able to get under way again for several days. Added to this fact was the knowledge that four men had been injured. Swede Jorgenson lay in his bunk, gritting his teeth at the pain from a back-fire which had flamed against his chest and shoulders. Three men from the seamen's forecandle suffered from broken bones or bruises, the results of falls on the lurching deck or sudden blows from waves which flung them against a bulwark. Captain Barry could only administer the first-aid treatment that he knew; it was evident to all that a doctor was needed at once.

Tod had no time to converse with Bruce until after the evening meal, when the new mess boy joined him on the poop. Tod sat on the deck beneath the awning stanchions which now carried only a few tattered shreds of canvas, his back against the forecandle skylight. His gaze swept out across the swells of the bay toward the green wall of jungle that curved around them a mile to leeward. With the passing of the hurricane, the *Congo* had drifted into one of those innumerable small bays which dotted the western shore of San Felipe; this was Mirror Bay, Mr. Brixton informed them, four miles north of the mission station and seven miles from his plantation.

"Maybe I'm off for a little jaunt on San Felipe," Bruce told Tod as he dropped to deck beside the boy. "The Old Man insists that someone try to reach the mission for help. The missionary is a sort of doctor. He and his wife dose the niggers when they're sick. I said I'd go for him."

Tod looked at his friend in surprise. "You'd never get there, Bruce! Why, these blacks are primitive Arada natives from West Africa. Just now they're about as friendly as sharks."

"What of it?" Bruce drew his arms about his knees.

"All I have to do is keep to the coast. Brixton says the niggers won't hurt the mission doctor; they believe his magic is too strong. Have you seen the Swede? Well, one glance at his face is enough. And one of the seamen has a broken leg. We'll have to get help."

Tod let his gaze stray forward where lay a tangled mass of rigging which had once held the derrick-boom supports in place. "I'll go with you, then," he said at last.

"No need, old chap. Brixton is thinking of going. He wants to get back to his bungalow; and he'll show me the trail to the mission hut."

"Brixton? I never thought he had the nerve."

"Neither did I. But something is drawing him back there. Why?" He glanced significantly at the faint line of beach, just visible in the gathering dusk. "If he's willing to attempt it tonight with those niggers after him, there's a mighty good reason."

"Does he want to get away from Gallardo?"

"Can't say. Gallardo is watching him like a cat does a rat. Why hasn't he taken this opportunity to get the revenge he wanted? Do you know what I've decided? I think that Gallardo wants possession of the plantation, and he's got to keep in with Brixton until he can make it legal."

"Or else," Tod put in. "Gallardo thinks Brixton has hidden money some place on his plantation. He knows his partner has been making plenty every year. He wouldn't want to lose his share."

Bruce lowered his voice. "Why hasn't any attempt been made on Gallardo's life? When French Louie was killed, I thought that the cabin passenger had been lucky, that's all; but why hasn't this unknown person struck again?" He paused and put his hand on Tod's knee. "I think the skipper murdered Louie."

"No—you're wrong, Bruce. It wasn't the captain."

"Then who was it?"

"The second mate."

"What! That daddy longlegs? He hasn't the ability to pull off anything as clever as that."

Tod snorted. "Hasn't he? You can never tell. Do you remember that at the inquiry I thought the captain was shielding someone? Well, I'm certain he knows that his second officer did the trick, thinking Gallardo was asleep in the sick bay. That's why he gave out that false verdict of suicide. He knew better."

Bruce meditated for a moment. "You may be right; but I'm not so sure. Of course, the captain and Mr. Sharp are in league with Brixton in this selling of contraband. If they thought that Gallardo's trip to San Felipe might interfere with their plans, they'd probably allow him to come on their ship and then get rid of him."

"The mess thought that Mr. Sharp was guilty."

"Black Jean?" Bruce hesitated; his brows knit in a frown. "I want to see him, too. He knows something about this contraband. I want to ask him if he knows anything about my father."

"But how could Jean know?"

"Didn't Captain Barry say that even Black Jean knew certain things? Maybe I've been blind and deaf."

Tod shot a keen glance at his companion. "What do you mean?"

"Only that I'm putting two and two together and find they make four." Bruce stretched his legs along the deck. "I'm beginning to remember things—that last winter Dad was badly in need of money. Perhaps he was forced into this illegal trade in order to keep his ships going."

"Aw, I don't believe it! The skipper's trying to throw us off the track. We're getting close to their secret."

Bruce smiled. "I hope you're right. But I want to make sure. I'm beginning to believe that this freighter is really a jinx."

"It's all too strange," Tod muttered; "everything on this ship!"

A voice from the ladder broke in. "Say, you fellers, the captain wants to see the mess."

"That's me," said Bruce, as he rose. "I'll let you know in a minute if I'm to go."

Tod followed him to the after deck, where he waited while Bruce was in conference with the officers in the saloon. Some twenty minutes later, he saw three seamen go aft to the poop and get the gig ready for lowering. At the sight Tod's pulses mounted. So Bruce was landing on San Felipe!

A little group of officers and men came aft from the starboard alleyway. Following the captain were the second mate and Bruce; then came Gallardo with the planter. Tod's glance focussed upon Brixton, who lagged behind. In the dim light of the alleyway, the boy perceived that the man's face was pale and distraught. Bruce had said that the planter wanted to land on San Felipe, to return to his plantation for some reason of his own. But this was no eager adventurer who would risk his life among the blacks of the island; rather was it a man driven against his will, driven by a force which he was powerless to resist. And that force? Tod did not doubt that it was Gallardo, who was intent upon every movement of his former partner. This, then, must be the man's subtle method of revenge, for he surely realized that to land on San Felipe meant certain death to the planter.

Bruce joined his friend at the rail. "I'm going," he announced triumphantly. "Brixton and I are landing. Four miles southeast the trail divides. I go to the mission hut, and he walks several miles farther to his plantation. I'll come back in the doctor's sloop. We ought to be here by dawn."

Tod moved a nervous hand along the bulwark. "But what about the uprising?"

"Oh, the niggers have probably cooled down in this

hurricane. I'm not afraid.—Good-bye, old chap. I'll see you in the morning."

"I don't like to see you do this," Tod said in a low tone.

"Don't worry," Bruce answered. He held out his hand. "Well, so long!"

"Good luck!" Tod called after him.

He watched the gig, carrying Bruce, Brixton, and two seamen, lowered to the gentle swells of the bay, and, in the swiftly gathering darkness, rowed away toward the shore. The boat vanished in the gloom, and with its disappearance Tod felt a recurring sense of impending danger flooding his mind. Even when the gig returned with the seamen, he stood at the rail, his gaze fixed on the dim line of jungle rising against the deep blue of the night. The sky was studded with stars; a new moon hung low over the hills.

A hand touched Tod's arm. Toppy's voice said quietly in the stillness of the after deck, "Well, 'e's gone. Yer won't never see yer friend no more."

"Oh cheer me up, Toppy. Of course he'll be back! Someone had to get the doctor."

"You cawn't get 'im on that bloomin' voodoo island. Blimey, that college bloke'll be shot before morning."

As the minutes dragged away, Tod paced the deck near the little fireman who at every turn threw him a remark prophesying instant disaster to the two white men on San Felipe. Suddenly the boy stopped and put out his hand for silence. "Toppo, do you hear anything?"

The little cockney raised his head. "Naw—wot yer mean?"

"A sound from the bush. There it is again—drumming!"

Tod quivered, for the beat of pagan drums, low, distant, tremulous, washed across to them from the slumbering bush.

"Blimey! Wot'd I tell yer? The blacks are out."

A tall figure loomed up beside them, and Tod saw

Señor Gallardo lean over the bulwarks. "They're discovered," the cabin passenger calmly remarked in a tone that hinted of secret satisfaction. "I know those drums. The blacks are signalling across the island."

Tod's hands closed on the bulwarks. "Are you sure?" "No—not sure. But I fear the worst."

Almost at once the drumming died away, leaving an ominous hush brooding over the bush. Tod soon went aft to his quarters; but the import of Señor Gallardo's words remained uppermost in his thoughts that night. Morning brought no sign of Bruce or the planter. No missionary sloop entered the bay; and the injured men in the forecandle knew that another day would go round without aid.

Work continued on the boiler as on the day before. By night Tod had come to a decision. Since Swede Jorgenson and the sailors were in dire need of medical aid, he'd make an effort himself to reach the mission. That evening he knocked upon the captain's door and entered at the surly command.

"What do ye want?" Captain Barry sat at his desk where an electric fan purred softly as it swung from side to side. The man's brow was deeply furrowed; his eyes, above his bearded cheeks, were dark in their sockets.

"I'd like to go for the doctor," Tod said quietly. "We've got to get him."

The captain regarded him in surprise. "Ye want to land on San Felipe?"

"Yes, sir. If you could see Swede Jorgenson and those men in the seamen's fo'c'stle! They've got to have help. Let me go!"

"You'd never make it, kid. You're batty."

"Someone has to try. Let me," Tod said beseechingly. "Put me ashore in the gig. I'd keep to the coast—I ought to reach the mission hut. The natives won't expect us to try again."

The captain rubbed a hairy ear. "Four men laid up. Black Jean and young Denton ashore. No, I can't afford to lose any more of the crew. We ought to get a wireless message through tomorrow. In five days we can pull out."

"Five days! The men need help before that. And the radio won't bring anyone very soon. Let me go, sir."

"Ye're a plucky youngster—ye sure got guts." Captain Barry rose. "I'll let ye try. But ye'll be the last man to leave this ship. Here—ye can take my pistol." He opened a drawer in his desk and shoved an automatic at the boy. "When do ye want to be put ashore?"

"Now. It's already dark."

"All right. Git ready."

There were not many preparations to make. Tod slid into black dungarees and a blue shirt; from Bruce's suitcase he borrowed a pair of tennis shoes which would be silent and good for running.

"Where you go, Kid?" Swede Jorgenson spoke from his bunk.

"Ashore. I'll try to get the doctor."

The big fireman's face lighted up for an instant, then he frowned. "No—no. You never make it. Not for me, Kid. You stay here."

Toppy leaned over his bunk board. "Blimey, Joe Macaroni," he admonished, "yer better listen to the Swede. For once, 'e's got sense. Don't yer go!"

Tod shook his head. "I'll try. If I can't make it past the native huts, I'll come back to shore in the morning. I'll be careful." He sprang up the steps to deck.

Once more the gig was lowered, and two old seamen rowed the boy across the mile of dark water and then dexterously shot the boat up to the beach. On the sand Tod turned. "If I don't come with the missionary in his boat, watch for me here tomorrow morning."

Suddenly he raised his head. Above the low roar of

the breakers that beat upon the white beach, there came the throb of a drum. It floated toward them from the bush, rhythmic, furtive, ominous. But Tod did not pause. He walked straight toward that sound; and a moment later the deep blackness of the bush closed about him.

TOD HEARS THE DEVIL DRUM

DRUMS WERE THROBBING THROUGH THE NIGHT. TOD COULD HEAR THEIR soft vibration in the air. Distant, weird, the tremulous tattoo echoed through the bush until he wondered if it were only the beat of his own pulse that he heard.

A half hour passed before he had struck a trail. As he advanced in the intense darkness, he decided that the path was leading him inland and away from the shore. He couldn't be certain, however; perhaps he only imagined that the drumming was slowly drawing nearer. On each side rose the bush, sombre, menacing, yet quiet. He made out vaguely the trunks of palms rising above, with their fronds meeting overhead against the luminous blue of the tropic sky. He heard the clatter of the fibrous edges as a faint breeze stirred them.

At length he came out into a clearing that fell away before him. Under the stars, he discerned a small patch of grain, and across that undulating slope rose the dark outlines of a village of thatched huts. Over the clearing lay the profound silence of sleeping things. It must be almost midnight, he told himself. Were the natives wrapped in slumber, or had they deserted their dwellings to attend a meeting beneath the moon?

Slowly he circled the cluster of huts. Once a dog barked, and at the sound, Tod stopped short. Would someone come? Would the dog follow him? Silence settled down upon the clearing, however, and he carefully went on. He entered the bush again. Here it was clearer than he had expected. Cocoanut palms rose on every side; shrubs blocked his path; but no dense undergrowth of trailing vines retarded his progress. Soon he stumbled

upon a path on the other side of the huts, and he breathed more freely. He hurried forward.

The trail presently forked in two directions. One seemed to lead inland, the other along the coast. He turned to the right here and followed southward. The trees fell away behind; the bush grew less dense. He was going through grass, tall and thin; its sharp blades brushed against his legs. He paused and looked about.

He stood on a little knoll that gave him a view of the land ahead. Dark rolling grass with occasional groups of trees spread out before him. To his left he distinguished a low line of hills, dark against the sky. As his eyes swept toward the distant ridge, he caught sight of a light that wavered through the trees. The acrid smell of wood smoke drifted to him on the breeze. Perhaps that was the meeting place in a great clearing in the bush. There, doubtless, the natives were congregated in a circle around a priest who presided over their voodoo ceremonies. While the boy stood there motionless, the ebb and flow of the drumming died softly away. Silence, abrupt and profound, brooded over the landscape.

When he started on again, he noticed that the path had vanished. Where had he left it? He searched about in vain. Sharp-bladed plants reared their heads here and there; patches of long grass extended down the hillside. Well, he had only to keep to the line of coast, and he would come to the mission hut. He struck out through the grass.

Gradually the impression crept over him that he was being followed. He halted and, gazing backward, listened. To his ears came the faint hiss of wind through the grass, the scurrying of a night prowler off to one side, the whirring of invisible wings. He looked up. Bats! Against the star-strewn sky, against the new moon that hung low over the hills, a half-dozen bats darted and swooped. With a gesture of annoyance, he moved on. He mustn't imagine things! He crossed a tiny stream

where the earth was soft and damp underfoot. Casting a glance over his shoulder, he came to a sudden halt. He felt himself go cold. On a small knoll behind him, he beheld the unmistakable form of a man sharply defined against the clear sky. At once, Tod dropped to earth. From the deep shadow of a thorny shrub, he peered out.

Outlined against the sky stood the huge figure of the man. He seemed intent, listening. Tod quivered in apprehension. Had the fellow seen him? Was he following? Then, as he watched, the figure vanished. Tod lay quiet, his pulse beating loudly in his ears. A bird fluttered in a thicket near him. Footfalls drew near.

He drew back beneath the shrub where thorns ripped through his thin shirt. Cold sweat broke out over him; he held his breath.

A voice, deep and vibrant, spoke from out the night. "Boy, where is yo'?"

Tod sprang up in surprise. A glad cry escaped his lips. "Black Jean—is that you?"

"Me—Jean Batiste."

Tod stumbled forward and gripped the mess man's hand. "Jean—I'm lost. Where is the mission hut?"

"What yo' do here?" The tone was one of disapproval. "Why yo' come ashore?"

"I'm going for the mission doctor. Four of the men are hurt. The ship's disabled and can't get under way for several days. I've got to get the doctor."

Something brushed against Tod's ankle; a purring sound came up to him. Black Jean chuckled, stooped, and lifted a dark object. Tod, looking closely, observed the black cat climb to Jean's broad shoulder. "Ah thought maybe yo' come. Ah watch the ship. Everyone's gone to big meeting back in the hills."

"Is it a voodoo meeting?"

Black Jean nodded solemnly. "Back theah." He waved his hand in the direction of the hills.

"Where's Bruce?" The words came, smothered, from Tod's lips.

"Ah dunno." The mess man shuffled uneasily. "Ah think maybe yo' come; so Ah watch. Ah take yo' back, put yo' aboard. Don't leave ship again, boy. Don't land any mo' on San Felipe!"

"But I've got to get the doctor first."

"Yo' neber git him! These niggers tired of white men here. They finish them all. Tonight they begin three days' celebration. They say they run the island themselves now."

"Are the missionaries gone?"

"The doctor sent his wife away, but he didn't go. If they find him there tomorrow, he sho' die." Black Jean paused and raised his hand. "Yo' hear that?"

Tod listened. Across the rolling country came the sudden rhythmic beat of a single drum. The sound, louder, more penetrating than any he had heard before, seemed to vibrate against his body till he trembled. "Yes," he whispered. "Drumming."

"That the Debil Drum! That means trouble for ebery white man here. Now they kill! Come, Ah take yo' back—quick."

"No, I'm going for the doctor. Won't you show me the path to the mission?" he entreated.

Black Jean stroked the cat for a moment. "Yas, sah," he grumbled at last; "then you kin go with missionary in his boat."

The huge Negro led the way with Max still swaying upon his shoulder. Tod followed in silence. They went on through the swaying sword grass, down little declivities where rocks cut through the boy's shoes, up rises until they entered a long tunnel of vegetation. Here trees blocked the path, branches at times made it almost impossible to go forward. It seemed hours before Black Jean halted and pointed ahead. "There's yo' hut."

Before them the land fell away to a small clearing

beyond which stretched a faint line of beach. "Ah leave yo' here, boy. Yo' go."

"Thanks, Jean." Tod did not move. "If you see Bruce," he implored, "you'll help him?"

"Mebbe. Now yo' go. Ah neber forget how yo' help Max. Wait." The Negro stepped forward. "Ah give yo' somethin'—a voodoo good-luck chahm. That keep yo' safe." He dropped a cord about Tod's neck.

"Thanks, I'll wear it." Tod felt a small pouch of heavy cloth hanging against his chest. It was cold to the touch. He wondered if it contained those strange animal relics—a frog's leg, a bit of goat's hair—which the Arada Negroes implicitly believed brought luck and wisdom to the wearer.

"Good-bye, Jean." Tod turned away. He clambered down the slope, passed a garden fenced in with wire and came to a dark, low building which rose before him. On the door of the wooden shack, he knocked. Presently he heard someone stir within and footsteps approach the door. "Who's there?" said a voice.

"I'm from the steamer *Congo*," Tod answered.

At once the door swung open. A candle, flickering in the night air, revealed the tall form of the missionary. His kindly eyes surveyed Tod in surprise. "Come in—come in. What's happened?"

Tod let the words rush from his lips. "We broke down during the hurricane; four men are badly hurt. We're anchored in Mirror Bay four miles up the coast."

"I'll get ready at once. Badly hurt, you say?"

Tod dropped into a chair. "The captain sent word to you last night, Mr. Raynor, by a friend of mine. Haven't you seen him?"

"Why, no. He never arrived here." The missionary turned his sympathetic, kindly face to the boy. "You think—the natives have got him?"

"I don't know," Tod said slowly. "He didn't come back to the ship."

As he watched Mr. Raynor make ready for his trip, he noticed that the missionary seemed overburdened with troubles of his own. Once the man raised his head and listened. Again sounded the distant beat of the drum. "That's the drum of their devil priest—the Papaloi." Mr. Raynor uttered the words in a sad tone. "For years I have given my life to my people here; I've worked for them and doctored them as best I can. And, look—it all means nothing. They hear the conjure man calling back in the bush, and they go. They think the white man is only here to oppress them." He sighed. "Too often that is true. But they do not see that I am different. They demand that I leave, too. Oh, I know what will happen! They'll fire Brixton's plantation, and this hut also. They've done it on other islands near here. All my work of years—gone in a night!"

Tod perceived that a great sadness had gripped him. His life work was ended; he had failed.

"And you are going?" Tod asked.

The missionary surveyed him with a sad smile. "All night I've walked the floor, debating with myself that very question. What should I do? I've not decided. But, come—we must get my boat out and reach your ship. That fireman who was burned must be suffering terribly."

He led the way out to the porch and down the slope to a wooden jetty. There Tod made out the dark outlines of a small skiff riding on the water beneath them.

Mr. Raynor went down a ladder and dropped into the boat. "Jump in," he directed.

"No—I'm not going," Tod replied.

"What?" The man looked up from the sternsheets.

"My friend may be a prisoner. I'm staying to see if I can't help him."

"Impossible! You don't know these blacks." Mr. Raynor's voice leaped in sudden intensity. "When that drum starts beating, they completely lose their minds. The present falls away from them—they slip back into the

African jungle. It's death to you if you stay. They might allow me to go quietly away in my sloop; but you—never!"

"But I can't leave without trying to find him."

"What can you do?"

"I don't know," Tod acknowledged. "I'll work this out, though. I've got to."

"You're mad to try it. The Negroes may come down to the mission at any moment. Oh, I know! Come!"

"No—I'm not leaving."

Mr. Raynor flung out an oar. "I think I understand. You still remain?"

"Yes."

"Then let me shake your hand." He rose and climbed the ladder. "You're a brave lad. May God help you! Good-bye."

Tod stood on the jetty, gazing through the darkness at the little boat as it was rowed across the bay. He saw the white sail swing aloft, saw the wind catch the fold and take it quietly outward. A moment later, the blur of the sail dissolved in the night.

Over the boy crept a feeling of intense loneliness, of utter helplessness. The last contact with his own world had vanished. He was alone.

INTO THE BUSH

BY DAWN TOD HAD MADE HIS PLANS. THERE WAS ONLY A FIGHTING CHANCE that he could help Bruce, a chance so slender and tenuous that it would not even bear much thought; but, nevertheless, he would risk it.

In the kitchen he found a canteen and an old canvas musette bag, and into the latter he stored food for his journey—canned goods from a shelf, a package of hard biscuits, and a machete. This last was a long sharp knife which he had discovered in a tool box; it was a weapon used, he knew, by the natives in cutting their way through the dense undergrowth of the bush.

After that, by candlelight he sat before a mirror in the bedroom and rubbed lamp black on his face and hands. He had no hope that this would completely disguise him; only that in the gloom of the bush at night, he might pass native villages unmolested. As he surveyed himself in the mirror he smiled. It was a mulatto who stood there facing him. Given a dark night, he should pass without suspicion.

Of a sudden the smile froze upon his face. He raised his head, listening. From the clearing outside came the faint, unmistakable crack of a rifle.

Instinctively his fingers closed over the candle flame. The room was plunged into darkness. He crossed to the kitchen window and peered out. Dawn was just breaking. Birds twittered in a near-by thicket. Over the garden shone a single star, not yet erased by the coming light. The landscape remained in shadow, merely a dark blur of trees and shrubs. Footsteps came running toward him,

then the scuff of shoes sounded on the steps of the porch. Could it be a white man? Bruce?

He leaped to the door and flung it open. A heavily built form staggered across the porch. "Raynor!" gasped a voice. "Help me."

On the instant Tod recognized the planter, Brixton. What was he doing here?

Tod closed the door behind the man and pushed the bolt. "What's happened?" he heard himself say.

Fumbling in the darkness, Tod helped the exhausted man into a chair. The planter's breath came in sobbing gasps. "Those devils!" he breathed. "They fired the plantation, tried to kill me—after all I've done for them!"

"After all you've done!" Tod spat out the words in sudden bitterness and fury. "You're the one who's in league with Captain Barry! You're the one who's smuggled firearms into these islands. And now, when the Negroes turn against you, you whine for help! Where's Bruce Denton? What's become of him?"

It was dark in the room, so dark that the boy could only make out the shadowy figure in the chair. Mr. Brixton was merely a voice, harsh, gasping, repellent.

"What do you mean?" the voice now shot at him. "Didn't the boy reach the mission?"

"No—the missionary hasn't seen him."

"Well, don't get so hot! We're in a mighty tight place. Where's Raynor?"

"Gone. He left an hour ago in the skiff. He went to the *Congo*."

The planter suddenly stood up. "Gone! God, then I'm too late! They'll get me." He grasped Tod's arm. "Aren't you the *Congo's* mess boy? What are you staying here for? Why didn't you go, too?"

"I want to find Bruce. Where is he?"

"I don't know. I pointed out the trail to him yesterday. They must have caught him—the devils! They'll be hold-

ing him back in the bush—probably at the home of the conjure doctor.”

“I’m going there, then—after him.”

His words were greeted by a mirthless laugh. “Why you’ll be too late. They’ll kill every white man found on this island. Oh, I know. You’re right—I’m a fool! I helped them get the rifles. I thought I was one of them. Well, I know now. Is there a boat left?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Raynor took the skiff.”

The man peered from the window. “I don’t see any of those devils. They’ll be hiding back in the shadow waiting for us to show ourselves. We’ve got to work together if we want to get out of this alive. There should be a dugout by the jetty. We can get away in that. Yes, we can make the ship yet. Have you a gun?”

“Yes, an automatic.”

“Then watch from the window. If you see them fire, aim at that spot and blaze away. I’ll slip down to the beach. If I find a boat, I’ll whistle twice. Come then—quick.”

Tod heard him stride through the house and go out the other door. The boy raised the window and rested his automatic on the sill. In the east the sky was lightening. Already the shadows were taking form. He made out the palms swaying against the sky, the garden fence, the low scrub that covered the hill behind the house. The minutes slowly passed. Had Brixton made the jetty yet? Would he find a boat? In any case, he could leave alone, Tod decided. He wasn’t going—not yet.

A shot abruptly echoed from the hill. Another followed. Tod aimed his automatic at the bush and fired once, twice. The quick reports shattered the stillness. Then silence once more closed down upon the clearing.

No movement came from the bush. Evidently the blacks were surprised to find their fire answered from the house. Well, for a moment, they’d be careful. Tod rose and, going to the door that faced the beach, looked out at the

jetty stretching into the water. As his eyes took in the scene, he started. Lying on the little pier near the shore was the dark inert figure of a man. Tod stared, aghast. The figure remained motionless. Brixton? Had the blacks seen his dim outline against the water and fired? Had he been hit, or had he merely dropped to the protection of the wharf?

Dawn spread slowly over the scene. Still the man on the jetty did not move. Tod trembled with apprehension. What should he do? If the man were killed, he probably deserved it, Tod told himself. He was the one who had roused the natives to action; he was directly responsible for Bruce's predicament. And then came the thought: perhaps Brixton was only wounded, unable to crawl back to the protection of the house. He couldn't let him lie there thus, suffering.

The next moment Tod had slipped from the porch and dropped full length upon the ground. He slid like a snake down the slope toward the jetty. The sky, he noted, was a lighter gray; the shadows, too, were vanishing. Doubtless, the blacks already were pointing their weapons at him. Banishing the thought, he struggled onward. The earth was cool and soft to his touch; his hands dug into the roots of the grass as he pulled himself forward. He dodged behind shrubs, circled the high ground, and at last found his outstretched hands touching the first planks of the little pier.

"Brixton!" he whispered hoarsely.

No answer.

He raised his voice. "Brixton!"

Still no reply. He crawled toward the motionless form. His pulse throbbed in his ears.

In a stirring instant Tod saw the man move slightly. "They've got me," Brixton moaned. His face was pallid as the dawn; his mouth drew tight over his teeth to keep back a cry. Tod, looking closely, discerned a dark spot on his shirt slowly widening.

"Here—I'll help you back to the house," he whispered. "We'll have to be quick."

There was no opportunity now to edge furtively along the ground. He rose and put his hands under the planter's shoulders. "Can you walk?"

"No—it's no use. The boat's gone. They have me now."

"We'll get away. Let me help."

Mr. Brixton shook his head wearily. "I can't make it. But for you there is one way, perhaps. Follow the coast away from my plantation and circle the island. It's forty miles around to Mirror Bay. The niggers will expect you to make the short cut. Travel at night——"

"Yes?"

"—And take a message to Captain Barry. Tell him a boat from Port Haitien brought a letter. It said the United States Government was investigating—they've put a secret service agent on the *Congo*."

"What! A secret service man?"

"Yes—they're drawing a net about us."

"Come." Tod forced the planter to struggle to his feet. The man was heavy; his arm clung to Tod's shoulder. They started back up the path.

A rifle shot whizzed past them. Another hissed overhead. Tod fumbled for his automatic, pointed toward the source of those shots, and fired twice. Then he hurried forward, dragging his companion. In a moment, they'd be safe. Thank Heaven, the Negroes were poor shots. Another volley spat past them. Tod's companion collapsed. His dead weight carried the boy to the ground.

"A moment more, we'll be there," Tod encouraged.

There was no reply. He gripped the man by both shoulders and dragged him forward to the porch. There he laid him down.

In the kitchen he found a bucket of water and came back. Though he wiped the planter's face, the man did not move. Something in the motionless form sent a question into Tod's mind. A cold sweat broke out upon

him. He put out his hand and touched the other's pulse. Not even the faintest tremor could he find. He put his head down to the man's heart and listened. Silence.

The boy looked up. Day had come. The bay stretched away blue and lovely. A flock of wild pigeons passed overhead with the beating of wings toward a grove of dark green mango trees.

As in a dream, Tod rose and stumbled into the house. Mechanically, he took the musette bag from the chair and flung it over his shoulder. Then he filled the old canteen and returned to the porch. He dragged the dead body of the planter within the house and gently closed the door. There was no time to lose. He slipped down the steps.

He knew that spot where the shots had come from. If he could keep the house between him and the blacks' line of vision, he might yet escape unnoticed. He dropped to the ground and crawled. This time he went to the left, away from the jetty. A few moments later, he entered a thicket of palms. Here he rose and darted for a small line of beach. As the soft gravel crunched underfoot, he broke into a run. The jungle that crept down to the very edge of the shore would hide him here.

Perhaps a hundred yards on, he paused. The beach ended; the jungle had encroached upon it down to the water's edge. Tod entered the cool depths of the bush just as the sun tipped the hills behind him. His breath came in gasps; his knees trembled, but whether from his flight or from the sheer horror of the last hour, he did not know. On the instant, he remembered his plans. He must find a place to hide, a place where he could lie quiet until night closed down again.

With a stealthy tread, he made his way through a grove of wild mango and acacias. Presently he came to a small clearing where melons and red-pepper vines grew, where Kaffir corn waved its rice-like head in the sunlight. He circled this, for he knew that a hut or two would be

close by. He stumbled upon a stream which flowed quietly in the shade. When he glanced to the left, he observed an old negress at her washing, beating her clothes on a stone at the edge. He stepped softly backward, turned, and plunged on again.

Soon the boy noticed that the ground was rising. If the Negroes did not follow his tracks, he might stumble on a hilltop where he could lie undiscovered throughout the day. He came to a rivulet that trickled down the hillside. It was almost dry; probably it was only filled by the tropical showers. He entered it, nevertheless, and followed up its bed for half a mile. Then it disappeared, and he came out into comparatively open country. Thickets of low trees, foreign to his eyes, dotted the hilltop; bushes with thorny leaves waved in the breeze. Far down the slope stretched long green canefields. He slipped to the ground and crawled forward to the topmost point.

There, in the midst of a clump of bushes, he wormed his way to the centre where a prickly *Sablier* tree grew. It was shady here; the sun at least would not reach him at the heat of day. He threw off his musette bag. After a swallow of water from the canteen, he felt better. Around him was the ceaseless murmur of the bush; the shrill clatter of a cicada, the whirl of insects, the flutter of small black finches, and the notes of noisy kingbirds. He crawled through the clump of bushes and peered out.

He lay on a hilltop far above the little beach and directly south of the missionary hut. He examined the clearing with eager eyes. The dark forms of several blacks were running from the house. They were doubtless sacking it in the exultation of victory. As he watched, a wisp of smoke rose from the house. It gathered headway; red flames crept up the wall; the roof broke into flames.

The men seemed intent upon their plunder. Presently two of them detached themselves from the little group and, with long sticks, entered the cluster of trees. A

moment later, they emerged beyond. Tod felt his mouth go dry. They were beating the bush.

They knew, then, that he had escaped them. They would creep up the hillside, beating the shrubs and thickets. Perhaps others would join them. He was doomed. By noon, at least, he would be discovered. Should he run? That was his first thought. Then he abandoned this plan with a sense of futility. He would probably only stumble unawares upon a group of natives. No—he must remain in hiding. He crawled back to the musette bag, and taking the machete from it, set about cutting the shrubs immediately about him. With the branches, he built a dark green wall around his narrow hiding place. A casual passer-by would miss him; only a person peering into this very thicket would discover his presence.

When this work was completed, he threw himself upon the ground, where a stray butterfly made a vivid touch of yellow against the green. There was no thought of sleep. His brain remained alert, even though his eyes drooped from weariness. Lying full length upon the grass, he slipped the automatic from the holster at his belt and fingered it. Now he was ready. Now he would wait for them.

THE GREEN SERPENT

ALL DAY TOD REMAINED IN HIDING. WHEN NOON CAME AND STILL HE heard no sound of approaching blacks, he allowed himself to drop into an uneasy sleep. Night was closing down on the bush when he woke. He sat up, at once alert. Had the Negroes given up their search for him as hopeless, he wondered, or had they been too interested in making off with their plunder to seek farther for a possible white man? On reflection, however, the thought assailed him that the Negroes had probably been so certain of his ultimate capture that they felt there was no need for haste.

He opened a tin of chipped beef and, with the hard biscuits, ate a meal that satisfied him. After this he dug a hole with the machete and buried the musette bag containing the remainder of the food. He must travel light that night; he'd only take his automatic. Perhaps he would return to this refuge later. The spot might possibly be identified by the prickly *Sablier* tree that grew above it.

Crawling from the thicket, he gazed down the hillside. Near the beach glowed a few charred embers; these were all that was left of Mr. Raynor's house. Although he listened intently, he heard no sound. A profound hush brooded over the bush. It was too early for the moon; the night promised to be dark. Would he be able to find the clearing in the jungle? Would Bruce be there? Softly he went forward, striking a line that led into the very heart of the bush.

A half hour later he came to a trail. He halted. No blacks had yet crossed his path. Yet it must be almost

ten o'clock, he knew, and if a meeting were again to be held, why were no drums summoning them? Gathering courage, he carefully advanced, his eyes and ears attuned to the night.

For hours he strode silently along, ever plunging into the jungle. Overhead, the trees met at times to form an arch; then he had to feel his way. But when the stars shone between the treetops, the trail was easily followed. Once he heard voices behind him, and immediately he darted off the path and hid in the dense undergrowth. The blacks went by, also headed for the hills; surely he was on the right trail then, a trail that might lead to Bruce. The voices soon were lost ahead, and again he resumed his journey. He came to no villages. Evidently the natives dwelt nearer the coast, where the bush was less dense.

The path now wound upward. The bush grew thicker about him. Pungent odours of mint and rotting leaves hung in the moist, cool air. Once he heard a night animal prowling through the underbrush, and his fingers closed on the automatic; but he did not pause. He swung along with the utmost care, for he knew that at any moment he might tread upon a fer-de-lance, one of those deadly serpents that abounded on the islands.

Suddenly he whirled. Unseen in the darkness, and unheard because of bare feet, three blacks were almost upon him. A spasm of tremulous fear passed through him. Too late to dart into the undergrowth, he could now only stumble along. He dared not increase his pace for fear of arousing suspicion. Would they pass him?

For several minutes he walked on, his eyes straight ahead; and for several minutes he heard the soft pad of native feet behind him. At least they were not yet distrustful; they did not hurry. Then, as he kept his even gait with fast-beating heart, he became aware of a pulsating tremor in the air, deep, rhythmic, penetrat-

ing. Drums! The drums were sending their message through the night.

At the sound, the footfalls behind came faster. He heard soft Creole words, half French, half African. Tod glimpsed a small stream by the side of the trail. He halted as a traveller might for a drink by the wayside, and, throwing himself native-fashion to the ground, he touched his lips to the water, his eyes focussed upon the Negroes. They passed with only a friendly word thrown to him—three dark forms who were soon swallowed by the blackness of the bush.

Presently he resumed his march, moving now with infinitely more caution. He knew that he was drawing close to the clearing; yet, as he advanced, he realized that the soft throb of the great drum was not drawing nearer. His mind drifted back to the stories which he had heard aboard ship, strange stories of voodoo drums that sounded louder at five miles than they did at a lesser distance.

Almost before he knew it, he came within sight of the clearing. Other figures were on the path now, ahead and behind. Through the bush flickered the light of a huge camp fire. An encroaching mass of trailing vines offered a means of escape, and into this he promptly darted. Here he lay in the deep obscurity until the footfalls had passed. From the clearing came the faint sound of voices, then the wild, rhythmic beat of a tom-tom. It seemed to throb through the bush and set the vines and branches swaying about him. He felt his pulse mount; his breath seemed to keep time to that regular beat—one, two, three, four—one, two, three, four. The moments fled while he lay there listening.

The voices from the clearing rose to a chant, as though hundreds of African throats were softly moaning a native song, sombre, haunting. Tod struggled to free himself from its fascinating melancholy. Rising, he plunged ahead where firelight filtered through the bush. Branches, moist and sticky, brushed his face; tendrils clung to his legs.

Near the slim trunk of a mango, he dropped flat on a mass of vines, crept forward, and peered into the clearing.

His eyes widened as he took in the sight. In the midst of the jungle an immense oval had been cleared. In the centre of this blazed a great wood fire. Its acrid smell smote his nostrils; the leaping flame tossed fantastic figures on the surrounding wall of green. Around the fire sat at least a hundred blacks. Some of the men were half naked; some wore thin tattered shirts and trousers frayed at the knees. The women were arrayed in gaudy red and green cloth that was tightly wrapped about their bodies. Many had dotted yellow scarfs wound about their heads; others had stuck green parakeet feathers in their woolly hair. Their bodies all swayed from side to side as they kept time to the beat of the drum. From their lips came a low mournful chant.

But what caught the boy's attention was the lone figure of a man who stood before a thatched hut. He was tall and spare, and over his glistening ebony body was thrown an animal skin. Large rings hung in his ears and nose; his kinky hair stood upright in queer little tufts; his face was daubed with many colours. He was the conjure man, Tod recognized, the witch doctor or the Papaloi, who ruled this tribe with his Guinea Coast fetish and his Congo prayers. He led the chant; his body swayed to the rhythm while his hands beat a quick tattoo upon his bony chest.

Tod dragged his eyes away from this fascinating figure to the drum. It stood just behind the conjure man and just outside the door of the hut. It was a long hollow log with a goatskin drawn tight about one end. Upon this a muscular Negro beat with his knuckles and hands. The sound, Tod noticed, was low, soft, and penetrating, certainly no louder here than it had been miles back in the bush. It wove a spell mysterious and haunting in its power.

Tod's eyes moved back to the circle. Black Jean sat

crouched on his haunches near the great drum, his eyes fixed intently on the fire. Tod, watching breathlessly, saw that the mess man alone was unmoved by the spectacle. He sat upright, motionless. Then his gaze swerved about him; something deep within him seemed to stir. The caressing rhythm of the chant evidently invaded his senses, for he began swaying from side to side. The spell of the voodoo ceremony wove its sinister magic about him.

Presently the chant ceased. The priest pointed to the sky where a new moon hung over the jungle. The worshippers looked up in ecstasy; a hum went round the circle. The priest turned to the hut and disappeared. A second later he came out carrying a wooden box perhaps a foot square, and covered on one side by a thin wire netting. Raising his arms, he slowly swung the box back and forth. At the sight, the natives broke into a low murmur of adoration, for behind the screen coiled a green serpent.

Placing the box gently on the ground, the Papaloi stepped upon it and raised his voice in a loud, shrill chant. At once the natives joined him; the swaying recommenced, the chant grew louder, the drum beat faster. The trees above the boy seemed to vibrate with the sound.

"Aie—Aie! Aie—Aie!

Voodoo Magnoom;

Aie—Aie! Aie—Aie!

Voodoo Magnoom!"

The priest jumped from the sacred box and whirled madly round and round, beating his hands upon his breast, throwing back his head, demoniac with its paint. Suddenly he stopped. He darted toward a group of his followers, and, reaching down, rose with something white and struggling in his arms. He stepped to the box again and held up his burden. A small goat, young and snowy white, gazed round the clearing. About its neck was tied a

red ribbon. For a moment the priest held the sacrificial offering for all to see. The drum increased its tempo; the chant grew faster. Then before Tod's astounded eyes, the priest took the goat between his knees, held back its head, and slashed his victim's throat with a knife.

Tod quivered. The thought struck him like a blow that he, a white man, was observing the secret rites of the Congo fetish worshippers in its utmost primitiveness. If he were found, it would mean instant death. The ages slipped away from him. He was on the edge of a clearing in the heart of Africa with a new moon riding overhead, the smell of wood smoke in his nostrils, and the throb of a tom-tom in his ears. Thus had mankind once worshipped strange gods of cruelty and vengeance, gods that demanded a life for sacrifice. Deep within him he felt unknown impulses stir. Fascinated, yet appalled by what he saw, he remained quiet while the scene passed like a terrible dream across his vision. The moon crept to the zenith; the air grew warm and damp.

A half-naked Negro, wearing only short trousers, emerged from the hut and stood at the doorway surveying the scene. Tod's eyes focussed upon him. The man was armed with a rifle that rested in the crook of one arm. He glanced over his shoulder into the hut, and then seated himself just outside the door. A thought flashed through Tod. Every movement of the man indicated that he was guarding something. Could it be a prisoner?

The certainty grew upon him that someone lay in that hut, probably securely bound. On the instant he felt his heart go cold. He remembered Señor Gallardo's words that night on the forecastle head, his tale of clandestine ceremonies held by the Congo fetish worshippers beneath a crescent moon. Would these blacks, firm in their belief that all their supplicating prayers would be answered, demand this very night the supreme sacrifice of a Goat Without Horns?

At the thought, a plan of action formulated itself in his

mind. He rose and, keeping well within the shadowy wall of green, began circling the clearing. The tempo of the drum increased; the trees about him seemed to quiver with the sound of that low chant.

"Aie—Aie! Aie—Aie!

Voodoo Magnoom;

Aie—Aie! Aie—Aie!

Voodoo Magnoom!"

Oblivious of the noise, the creeping tendrils, the branches that slashed his face, he stumbled ahead. He had only one thought—to peer into that hut. Suddenly a small black waterway opened below him. Too late even to grasp a trailing vine, he plunged downward. He hit a log by a stagnant pool; his right foot crumpled beneath him.

A stabbing pain shot through his ankle. His teeth bit into his lips to keep back a cry. What had he done—what had he done! Was it a sprain or a broken bone? Attempting to rise, he sank back with a groan. Yet he must go on—on. In the darkness, he felt for the pool's edge, found the point where the ground slipped away into the evil-smelling water, and dragged himself forward on his knees. He refused to let his mind dwell on his hurt. Even though his foot throbbed like an open wound, he crawled forward, inch by inch, closing his eyes, trailing his foot in the mire.

He crept through the thicket to the shadow of the hut, which was only a few feet from the undergrowth. There he put his ear to the wall of woven reeds. No sound came from within. He took his knife from his pocket and, with the utmost care, slit the wall for a few inches. Pulling the strands aside, he gazed within.

In the open doorway opposite sat the Negro guard, naked to the waist, and evidently sharing the frenzied fervour of the circle of worshippers. His glistening shoul-

ders, seen against the leaping flames, impressed Tod with their sheer strength even more than the sight of the rifle that lay across his knees. Flickering shadows played on the floor of the hut; and in their light he made out a prostrate form lying close to him. It was a man rigidly bound from shoulder to heel, but whether white or black Tod could not tell. Then the prisoner began pulling at his thongs, wrenching his hands in an effort to loose his bonds. A groan, a cry, escaped his lips. Tod quivered at the sound.

The prisoner in the hut was Bruce.

Beyond the doorway, the din of the chant continued. Tod whispered in a voice vibrant with emotion, "Bruce, it's Tod! Roll over this way. I've a knife."

The prisoner moved slightly; and Tod knew that his friend was turning an incredulous face his way. He uttered no word, but slowly he began working his way across the few feet of matted floor to the rear wall of the hut. Tod thrust his knife through the slit. A moment later Bruce's body touched his hand. Tod felt for the goatskin thongs and sawed furiously on the stout cords.

"It's working," Bruce whispered. "Just give me a chance."

Tod felt the thongs slowly slip aside. The knife was taken from his grasp. Bruce's arms were free; now, evidently, he was cutting the thongs that bound his feet together. Tod rose to his knees. He must be able to flee with Bruce—he must. Behind him he heard his friend slit the reeds farther apart. Bruce stood beside him.

"Come on!" said the well-remembered voice, "we'll run for it!" Bruce moved off.

Tod felt the perspiration break out on his forehead. He took a step and stumbled. "Go ahead," he whispered.

Bruce whirled. "What's wrong?"

"My ankle. I fell. It's only sprained. Go ahead!"

A sound to the left made them glance up. The Negro guard stood there by the corner of the hut, looking at

them in amazement. The man raised his gun; but already Bruce sprang forward. A rifle shot cut harmlessly overhead. The man staggered backward and fell.

"Quick!" Bruce gasped. "Run!"

Tod put out his foot, stumbled a few steps, and went down. "I can't make it," he groaned. "Go, Bruce, before they come!"

The other stooped above him. "Not alone."

"Go on," Tod implored him quickly, "I came to help you. Don't let us both be taken. Run!"

In his ears was the sudden shout of the guard, the sound of approaching footsteps, the murmur of angry voices. Bruce did not move. He fell on one knee and grasped the fallen rifle. But even as he raised it, the blacks were upon them.

Tod felt muscular hands drag him to his feet. He swayed against the hut. "Why didn't you go?" he uttered brokenly. "Why did you stay?"

Bruce struggled in impotent rage in the hands of his captors. At length he subsided; a wry smile broke over his engaging face. "Didn't you once say," he explained, "that we'd see this through together?"

CHAPTER V

PLANS OF ESCAPE

BOUND HAND AND FOOT, THE TWO PRISONERS WERE THROWN HEADLONG into the inner darkness of the hut. A guard was again placed at the door, where he sat with a rifle across his knees. Outside, the noise soon subsided; and it became evident to the boys that the blacks were dispersing, leaving only the Papaloi and the guard in the clearing.

"What's happened?" Tod whispered, as he lay some few feet from his companion. "Why doesn't the blamed festival go on?"

Bruce heaved a deep sigh. "Morning must be almost here. If the moon has gone down behind the hills, that would end their ceremonies."

"Where did you learn that?"

"I've learned a lot since I was brought here yesterday. Now tell me, old man, how you came here. I'm frightfully sorry I led you into this trap."

Tod recounted his experiences since he left the ship, after which he listened in turn to Bruce's story. The latter was simple enough. Bruce had left Mr. Brixton at a point where the trail divided and gone on alone. When almost to the missionary hut, he had been intercepted by a group of blacks; he had found himself in their midst before he was aware of it. All day he lay a prisoner in this hut, wondering what they meant to do with him. He hadn't worried much; not until he glimpsed from the doorway the sacrifice of the goat did he realize his danger. No need to worry now; they were safe until another night at least. Tod refused to see the other's point of view; but, finally, from sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep, his ankle throbbing with a dull pain.

When he woke, a shaft of brilliant sunlight quivered in the doorway. Seeing that only a straw mat covered the earth floor, he was not surprised that every muscle in his body ached as if he had been flogged. His wrists, too, were cut by the rope that bound them tightly together. With an effort he turned over on his side and faced the rear of the hut. Bruce lay there watching him.

"You certainly can sleep, big boy," he greeted. "You must have been fagged completely."

"I was," Tod replied as he stretched himself. "Seen anyone this morning?"

"Only old white top there." Bruce's glance strayed to the gray-haired Negro who sat outside the entrance. "It's almost time we ate. They'll let us run around the yard soon."

Bruce's words were true. The Papaloi presently came from his hut across the clearing. He now wore the light shirt and trousers of the natives; his black ugly face had been washed of all traces of the ceremonial paint, but his hair still waved in tiny tufts. He spoke soft Creole words to the guard, and the latter unbound the rope about the prisoners' hands and replaced the bond about their feet with a loose chain. Large ungainly padlocks clamped each fetter tightly secure; while the prisoners could walk with care, they could hardly hope to run. Tod's ankle was burning again; and the guard, when he understood, allowed Bruce to bandage it with a strip torn from Tod's shirt.

"That'll help some," Bruce said as he finished. "It doesn't appear to be a sprain, but you'd better not try to walk."

Bruce strolled into the clearing for exercise, while the armed guard watched him closely. Tod sat just within the door. Soon he saw the Papaloi emerge from his own hut with two bowls in his hands. He motioned to the guard, who went over to him and brought the boys' breakfast to the hut. Bruce returned, walking slowly and

awkwardly with his fetter chain clanking, and sank upon the ground to eat his dish of cooked meal, probably Kaffir corn.

Tod, glancing out the door to the compound, turned an excited face to his companion. "Here comes Black Jean!"

"Well, what of it? He never tried to help me once!"

The former mess man of the *Congo* stopped at the entrance of the hut to talk to the guard. The boys could not make out the strange Creole words; but presently the old man rose, gave up his gun, and departed. Black Jean seated himself in the doorway.

Hope sprang swiftly into Tod's breast. "Jean, you're on guard today?" he asked.

Black Jean grunted assent. "Doan' talk too much, boy," he returned in his low musical tones. "Ah tell the guard Ah take his place. What fo' yo' come here? Ah told yo' to go with missionary."

"I had to see Bruce."

"Well, yo' saw him. Now yo' both prisoners."

Tod edged closer to the door. "What do they mean to do?"

"Tomorrow night," Black Jean whispered, "they hold big festival when the blacks from the Maisi Island come here. Then they all go to Maisi to kill the whites there. Yo' two boys bring them good luck. They use yo'."

Tod's eyes opened wide. "What do you mean? In the ceremonies?"

"Ah doan' know," Jean responded with a shrug.

"But we've got to get away, Jean—get back to the ship. Will you help us?"

"Me? What kin Ah do?"

"Tonight—late, let us loose."

"Ah ain't got no key to those locks."

"Bring us a file. We'll get away."

"Yo'd be caught."

"No, we wouldn't. I've got food hidden. We'll go round the island."

The mess man did not reply. Tod, gazing past him, saw the black cat making its way across the clearing. It scampered noiselessly up to them. Jean drew his big hand across the shining fur, and the cat purred and arched its back.

"Come here, Max, you little devil," Bruce called. He shoved his bowl of mush toward the cat. Max looked in, slowly advanced with dignity, and smelled the food. Evidently it was to his taste, for he delicately dipped his tongue into it.

Tod turned again to the mess man, and finally the huge Negro blurted out in sudden decision, "All right, boy, Ah help yo'! But we gotta be careful."

Tod's heart leaped. "We will, Jean. We won't let them suspect you."

For an hour the three talked earnestly together, making careful plans for escape that night. Jean would stand guard until noon, when the old man would relieve him. That night he would find a file, two if possible, and return at dusk to take over the guard again. He would agree to watch till midnight, and during those four hours the boys must succeed in filing loose their fetters; but they must not try to escape until later, when the old man was on duty. The only defect in their plan was that Papa-loi's helper might examine their bonds. That was an eventuality that they must chance, for Black Jean refused to allow them to get away while he stood guard.

At noon the old man returned, and the mess man disappeared down the jungle trail, with Max swaying on his shoulder. Bruce sat near the rear of the hut, and Tod edged over to him.

"I don't trust that mess man," Bruce said in a low tone. "Will he really do what he says?"

"I think so. Why not?"

"If he does, we may be sure it's for a reason of his own! He wants to get rid of us."

Tod turned the words over in his mind. Undoubtedly, Black Jean was playing a game of his own. With his black cat he had come to his old home on San Felipe to become a man of power. If he could wrest that power from the conjure man, then before him lay a life of ease and authority. Were the two prisoners of the Papaloi to escape, that would probably mean a lessening of the belief of the blacks in their present ruler.

In the middle of the afternoon, when the heat of the sun was becoming almost unbearable, the two youths were surprised to see Black Jean cross the clearing to the hut. A few words passed between him and the guard, and then Jean entered.

"Yo' hurt yo' leg, boy? Ah fix it." He dropped at Tod's side, unbandaged the ankle, and placed several damp green herbs about it. "That make it well, quick." He bent lower and whispered in the boy's ear, "Ah foun' a file. Ah bring it tonight!"

Tod regarded him with kindling eyes. Jean rose and crossed to the door as Bruce called to him.

"Yeah," replied the mess man, turning.

Bruce leaned forward. "Jean, did you ever hear of anyone in New York who is behind this gun-running business?"

"Ah hears that some big man there buys the guns and ships them here. But Ah dunno who. The cap'n, he knows, and Gallardo, too."

"Gallardo!" Tod echoed. "What's he got to do with it?"

"Ah dunno; that man is the cap'n's frien'. Ah doan' like him." Without another word, Jean swung off toward the trail.

"Bruce," Tod broke in abruptly, "Brixton told me that there was a government agent on the *Congo*. Who can it be?"

Bruce started. "A secret service man? Are you certain?"

"No. Only what Brixton said. When he got back to the plantation, he found a letter there. He told me to be sure and tell the skipper."

"Could it be anyone in the firemen's fo'c'sle?"

Tod shook his head. "No, hardly. We know those men too well."

"Do we? We only know, old chap, what they appear to be. Still, it might be a seaman or a quartermaster."

"I don't think so. It's probably someone who has never been to sea before. We'll look them over when we get back."

"When we get back—yes," Bruce added in an ironical tone.

The day wore on by degrees to its end. It seemed an eternity to the boys waiting eagerly for its going. When the sun at last disappeared behind the wall of jungle and shadows invaded the clearing, Tod became restless. Within a few hours now, if nothing interfered with their plans, they should be making their way to the coast.

Bruce was unusually silent. He seemed absorbed in problems of his own, and Tod knew that his friend was trying to piece together the stray bits of evidence that they had picked up aboard the old tramp. What part was his father playing in this gun-running? Was his the brain that directed the trade from the safety of his office in New York? This personal problem was of such a vital character, Tod realized, as to cloud his friend's appreciation of their critical situation. Somehow, in spite of all that Captain Barry or Mr. Sharp had let fall, Tod doubted Mr. Denton's complicity. Yet did not Bruce see some connection? This new knowledge that a secret agent was on the *Congo*, probably an unnoticed member of the crew, silently moving about in his investigations, gathering evidence that would convict the men in a court of law, was enough to weigh Bruce down with the burden of his thoughts. A week ago, this government agent would

have meant an ally and a friend. Now, if Mr. Denton was really active in this secret trade, this man would only be another antagonist, another enemy.

The Papaloi again brought their food. As the man went out of the hut, he stopped and spoke angrily to the guard. Their voices rose in a fury of words. Tod looked out and saw coming toward them across the clearing the massive figure of Black Jean, with Max riding as usual on his shoulder.

The conjure man went to meet him. Tod heard their distant talk. Evidently the priest did not like the black cat, for he pointed at it as though in accusation, while his voice shrilled out over the bush. Black Jean wavered, turned about, and went toward the trail again. The guard rose, and entering, securely bound the boys' hands behind them. They were taking no chances of their prisoners' escaping that night, Tod told himself bitterly. What had happened, anyway? Had the Papaloi suspected Jean's plans to gain a position of affluence and power for himself on San Felipe? Had the man suspected, too, that Jean was friendly toward the two prisoners? If so, what of their plans?

Tod told his fears to Bruce, but that youth still remained strangely silent. Yet, as the moments lengthened into hours, as the sky darkened and night came on and still no sign of Jean appeared, the boys' fears grew. They must get away that very night, or it would be too late. They dared not make the attempt by light of day; neither could they hope to get away when the natives were gathered the following night, when they celebrated their Maisi Island exploit.

The hours dragged their weary way toward midnight. The new moon rose over the bush, casting faint shadows into the clearing and tinting a square of silver moonlight on the floor of the hut. Tod stirred in feverish anxiety. Now was their time to escape. Now, surely, Black Jean would come.

But the moments stole past without interruption. Tod heard the soft sigh of the breeze in the acacias behind the hut; the cry of a night bird, the swish of bats as they circled overhead. As the moon rose higher over the clearing, Tod's vague apprehensions deepened. He and Bruce lay quiet and alert, waiting. Would Black Jean fail them? Would the night slip past and day appear without their making any effort to escape?

A low whisper across the room sent Tod creeping toward his companion.

"Tod, it must be three o'clock."

"Yes, but Black Jean will be here yet."

"What if he fails?" came the low response.

"He won't. He'll come."

"Hush!"

The guard had stirred from his position on the ground outside the door to peer into the hut. Soon Tod felt a drowsy lethargy steal over him. He closed his eyes. Black Jean would come—he wouldn't fail.

A soft purring roused him. He sat up with a start. The light of early dawn filtered through the doorway revealing Max sitting with the utmost unconcern near by, washing his paws and blinking in contentment.

Quickly Tod looked round. If Max was here, then his master could not be far off. The guard was now half asleep, sprawled out before the doorway; the clearing was cold and silent in the pale light. Still no sign of the huge Negro.

"Tod—Tod!" It was Bruce's voice.

"Yes?"

"What's happened to Jean?"

"He must be somewhere around. Max is here."

As the rude walls of the hut emerged from the gloom, Tod suddenly observed a white cord wound about the cat's neck. With a nervous movement, the boy swung over on his back, raised his trembling hands, bound as they were, and felt for the string. A paper crackled be-

neath his touch. He spread it open, then swung over again and lowered his head over the small white square. Through burning eyes, he saw that Max had brought him a note, scrawled in large clumsy letters. Ill-spelled, crudely written though it was, there was no mistaking its meaning.

"Tod, what is it? A message from Jean?"

The boy answered in a dazed voice. "Yes—the Papaloi got suspicious. He ordered Black Jean to Maisi Island—to help bring over the blacks for tonight's celebration. Jean had to go."

Bruce did not reply, for no words were needed. Both boys understood. Their carefully laid plans of escape had failed.

THE VOODOO CHARM

"WE'VE GOT TO GET AWAY TONIGHT," TOD WHISPERED; "WE'VE GOT TO make new plans."

It was morning, and already the sun beat down upon the clearing with an intensity that sent quivering heat waves rising into the silent air. Within the hut the golden haze was reflected upon the walls of yellow reeds. To the prisoners sitting immobile on the matted floor, it brought a sharp foretaste of the tropic day ahead of them. So stifling, so enervating was the heat that their minds refused to function. Every new idea that they discussed, they finally discarded with a sense of its utter futility.

Tod inwardly writhed at the thought of their helplessness. Securely bound and shackled, they could only lie there as the relentless moments slid away, each hour drawing them nearer to the ceremony which the blacks would hold that night beneath the moon.

"If only our hands were free," Bruce groaned. "If we even had a knife!"

"What happened to mine?" Tod questioned. "I slit the rear wall with it and then gave it to you." He looked over at the slender aperture in the reed wall through which Bruce had slipped two nights before, and which ever since had taunted them with a glimpse of the slumbering bush, so close and yet so unattainable.

"I don't know—it disappeared," Bruce replied after a moment. "The Papaloi must have taken it. . . . But what's the difference! We couldn't run with these chains on our feet."

They soon relapsed into silence. Tod let his gaze sweep

in impotent fury toward the guard at the door; then his glance strayed on across the clearing where butterflies, yellow and white and gold, fluttered about a tamarind tree in full blossom. He wrenched at his thongs. They were helpless without a key to open the heavy padlocks on their shackles, and that key, he knew, was held by the Papaloi, who rarely came near them. Like oil on the agitation of his mind came the thought of Black Jean. But the mess man could not possibly return from Maisi before evening when he brought the other blacks over in the island skiffs. Until then they could do nothing—nothing.

In despair and bewilderment, the boy closed his eyes. A feeling of acute weariness flooded his mind and body. Just let him sleep and forget. That was all he wanted; he wouldn't try to think any more. Yet he recalled, with a little catch at his throat, those blistering steel decks of the *Congo*, and the close, sweltering forecastle. Strange how their memory now suffused him with a rosy glow! Across his vision passed the figures of the men—Toppy with his quick, eager movements; Swede Jorgenson's pink face, stupid and kindly; Panama Pete's dark countenance. Would he ever see them again? Would he ever sit on the iron bitts outside the firemen's door and watch a ship appear hull down on the far horizon, slowly take form, and advance across a sea of opalescent blue? Was he never to feel the decks vibrate once more beneath him, hear the wind sing again through the rigging, nor see the gulls wheeling about the masts, waiting for the refuse of the galley to be thrown overside?

At the thought, his mind seemed to leap instantly awake. By thunder, he wouldn't give up yet—he wasn't through fighting by a long shot! He'd watch every step, every movement of the natives; at the least opportunity, he'd be ready. His lips closed resolutely together. Into him surged a feeling of belligerency; his eyes glowing with

new hope, he waited patiently for a possible glimpse of a fighting chance.

Toward noon, a squall rolled in from sea, driving the guard into the hut. The heavy rainfall thundered upon the thatched roof and dropped like a misty curtain across the doorway. By afternoon, the storm had passed. The sun shone serene and warm while the jungle steamed. The shrill rasp of cicadas sounded above the constant low hum of insects. In the breathless heat outside the door, a soft moving sound grew louder, and a column of ants, coming and going, passed like silent, inexplicable legionaries.

The shadows of late afternoon crept across the clearing and climbed the far wall. A flock of parakeets settled upon the green branches of an acacia, chattered there for several moments then flew over the open space and disappeared into the gloomy, whispering jungle. Night came on; stars emerged from the deep blue of the sky. Soon native voices floated into the hut, and Tod perceived from their tones that all had gone well with the Negroes' plans. Evidently, the blacks were ready for their ceremony beneath the moon before beginning their attack upon Maisi Island. Was Jean with them? Search as the boy did the limited bit of clearing visible in the light of the small camp fire, he saw no figure that resembled the huge mess man of the *Congo*.

Soon, however, Max again came into the hut and sat near by, stretching and mewing as though he had recently waked from a long day's sleep and was now ready to prowl through that strange world which opened to him at night. Max had apparently not found his master yet, Tod reflected. He watched the cat closely, for he was convinced that the uncanny creature would instantly know when Black Jean entered the clearing.

He heard the natives building up an immense fire; and presently, the flames leaped like molten gold on the inner wall of the hut. Of a sudden, Max jumped for the

door. Tod and Bruce both gazed into the clearing. Black Jean stood by the fire.

With swift running leaps, the cat crossed to the fire and sprang to the shoulder of the mess man. Tod saw the Negroes regard the strange pair with evident suspicion, then move away with whispering words. Black Jean's rough-hewn face broke into a grin as he stroked the cat's fur.

A sudden cry went up from the natives. They pointed overhead to the velvety tropic night. The moon—the moon! The crescent moon was rising over the bush.

Now the ceremonies commenced: The men and women took their places in a large circle about the fire. The Papaloi, once more garbed in his priestly leopard skin, his face again painted like an evil mask, stepped forward. The great Devil Drum began beating; the priest took up the chant; the Negroes swayed in unison to that stirring rhythm.

The Papaloi soon swung about and came to the hut. He motioned to a follower, who entered and placed a square box upon the floor. Tod glimpsed the little green serpent perhaps a foot and a half long, coiling behind the wire screen that imprisoned it. The priest's shrill voice broke out again. Two armed guards untied the prisoners' hands and unlocked the chains about their ankles. Tod swayed upon his feet as the blood rushed through his cramped limbs. Glancing across at Bruce, he saw that the other's face was pale yet resolute.

The guards waved them to the door. Together the two prisoners stepped out into the clearing and faced the waiting throng.

"Watch for a chance," Tod whispered. "Jean may help."

Bruce nodded. "Tod," he said in a low vibrant voice, "I got you into this. There's no telling what they may do."

Tod tossed aside the words. "We've still a chance. My ankle is better—thanks to Jean. Watch! Be ready!"

Already the boy's glance had swept the circle, taking in the voodoo worshippers sitting solemn and hushed about the immense leaping fire, the sombre wall of jungle with the firelight playing upon it, the quarter moon rising overhead. Then his gaze focussed upon Black Jean, crouched on his haunches near the drum, with Max upon his shoulder. Tod saw Jean's eyes come his way, waver for an instant, then pass on to the fire.

Tod's throat moved convulsively. He wanted to shout, to cry out to Jean, "Do something—anything! Only don't sit there without a word, without a glance."

The Papaloi swung across his line of vision. Tod, looking closely, observed two small figures of clay held in the man's upraised palms, tiny figures moulded into the semblance of men. What under heaven, he wondered, were those toys for?

He was not left long in doubt. The conjure man pointed to the moon; and at once intense silence descended upon the clearing. The Negroes watched their priest, breathless, eyes gleaming. The Papaloi addressed them for several minutes, turned to the boys, and suddenly flung one of the little clay manikins at the feet of Bruce. It lay there on the ground, unbroken.

Tod raised his eyes to the priest. Did he only imagine that he saw hatred, intense and overwhelming, shining there in the man's evil eyes? Was it because he had intruded two nights before and perhaps interrupted the solemn ritual of the Goat Without Horns? Again the Papaloi lifted his right arm; he flung the second manikin at Tod's feet. The boy gave a little start. This time the priest had thrown with all his strength. The clay figure lay shattered on the ground.

At once a great cry went up from the circle of Negroes. Their priest silenced them with upraised hand. Tod

looked round at Bruce. Escape—escape! How could they flee from this evil spot?

As two blacks stepped forward, Bruce whispered, "Keep up your courage. I've an idea." Tod saw the two Negroes shove his friend into the darkness of the hut.

Now he stood alone between the fire and the line of seated blacks, with only the priest near him. Behind them the drum took up its beat; the native chant began. The priest joined in for a few minutes, then he stopped, entered the hut where Bruce had disappeared, and came forth with the box in which was kept the sacred serpent. Placing the box upon the ground near the boy, the priest stepped upon it. He raised his long thin arms toward the moon. His shrill voice floated high above that deeper surge of the chanting multitude. The drum increased its tempo. The waves of sound washed across the clearing, hurled themselves against the wall of green, and rose into the still night air.

Now the priest was whirling madly around, his ebony body glistening in the firelight, his head thrown back as though baying at the moon, his eyes wide with the insane stare of a fanatic. Now he stopped and was standing directly before the boy. As in a dream Tod faced him. Surely this was not real—surely he would presently wake and find himself back in his bunk on the *Congo*. Straight and tall he stood, his hands clenched, his eyes unflinching while about him flowed those waves of sound as if a breaking surf were closing over his head, dragging him out to sea with the undertow.

He felt a hand at his throat. The Papaloi grasped his shirt collar and tore it open across his chest. On the instant, Tod saw the priest step back with fear and astonishment gleaming in his eyes. Puzzled, the boy looked down. There upon his chest lay the forgotten voodoo charm which the mess man had placed there three nights before. The blacks had seen it, too, for the chant ceased. A stir went round the circle.

The priest turned upon his followers in wrath, his tongue lashing them. A superstitious black cried out and pointed overhead. They all looked up. The moon had vanished behind a cloud.

A murmur of awe rose from the assembly. Tod quivered. Now that a moment's respite had come to him, he was at once aware of the full danger of his position. Would that good luck charm on his chest help him—that queer little charm which he had worn only with amusement? Would the moving clouds that obscured the moon send a shiver of doubt and apprehension through the worshippers? But, no—the priest's tongue was whipping them into submission. Tod felt his heart grow cold. They were nodding in agreement.

Directly behind him he heard a stir. Looking round, he beheld a woman rise from the line of blacks and slowly draw near. Her trembling arm was outstretched, pointing at the sacred box. A low cry went up from the throng. Tod glanced down. The box was empty.

In a flash of understanding Tod realized that this was the work of Bruce. Thrown into the hut unbound and unfettered, aware of the supremely important part played in the ceremonies by the little green snake, he had opened the lid of the box and allowed the sinuous captive to escape. Hope, swift and unfathomable, leaped into Tod's breast.

The next instant that hope was drowned in surprise as he saw the woman quickly step back and run. Something small and jade-green had flashed from the door of the hut. Tod started. On the ground before him lay the sacred serpent. It coiled its short slender body in fury. Its head darted from side to side; its wicked eyes shone with a lustrous gleam, while its tongue slid like a point of fire from its mouth.

In the moment of stunned silence that followed only one form moved. That was the black form of Max. The cat hurled himself from his master's shoulder straight

at the coiling serpent. There before it, he drew himself up, his back arched high and quivering, his tail lashing the air from side to side, his teeth bared as he spat at the hissing reptile.

The snake coiled itself as though about to strike. Max stepped warily backward, slowly circled. His yellow eyes blazed with an unholy light. The Negroes did not stir. Appalled yet fascinated, they watched that scene before them.

Only the Papaloi bristled with wrath and fear. Who had dared interfere again with the secret ceremonies? Who had dared set this fantastic black cat upon the sacred serpent? The priest's mouth slid into a snarl over his teeth; the curly tufts of his kinky hair shivered in agitation. He stooped to grasp the cat. Quick as a flash, Black Jean sprang to his feet. An arm of steel swept about the priest's slim body and flung him back.

Tod marvelled at the courage of the mess man. Evidently Black Jean believed that if Max triumphed over the sacred serpent of the Papaloi, then the power over these blacks might be his and not the priest's. Tod trembled at the thought. Surely Jean was forgetting the many years that the conjure man had ruled this island. But, for the moment, at least, the natives had not taken sides. Tod looked down. Max was drawing closer to the snake.

The small green body was coiled like a spring; from the swaying head darted that tongue of fire. Suddenly the serpent struck. Tod cried out. The cat had swerved, however, and as the reptile attempted to recoil, the black beast was upon it. The cat's jaws crunched on the sinuous body just back of the head. The last moments of the little green snake had come.

In that stirring instant, the boy heard a voice—"Tod!"

He edged toward the hut, his glance moving about to see if he were observed. The blacks were intent upon that strange drama where Max now triumphantly held the writhing snake in his mouth, with the twisting green

tail pinned to the ground by his claws. A shrill note of frenzy burst from the Papaloi, a bellow of victory from Black Jean.

The boy slid into the hut. "Hurry!" called a voice from the rear. Even as Bruce choked out the word, from the clearing rose a prolonged roar of fury. Tod threw a terrified glance over his shoulder. Was his disappearance already noticed? But the natives apparently had no thought for him; they were scrambling to their feet, flinging themselves toward the gallant Max and the scene of his desecration.

Tod saw the cat look round as though he sensed his danger. Abruptly Max flashed across the clearing, the snake dragging like a green blade of grass in his jaws. The blacks came on, crowding in a close circle about the mess man and the Papaloi whose voices rose high into the night. The priest pressed through the throng to the armed guard near the drum and snatched the rifle from the man; then, taking swift aim, he fired at Max. Tod saw the shot harmlessly plough the ground near the cat.

Black Jean cried out in fury. The huge mess man grasped the priest's thin body, lifted the struggling form high above his head, and flung it to the earth with a thud.

A hand pulled Tod to the far side of the hut. A voice whispered, "We can't help Jean. Hurry!" Bruce crept through the aperture and held back the severed reeds. Tod dropped to his knees and crawled through. Facing them was the high dark wall of jungle with the shadow of the hut silhouetted upon it. Swiftly the two boys plunged forward. Like shadows they merged into the depths of the sleeping bush.

JUNGLE FLIGHT

THE TWO FUGITIVES WERE STUMBLING, DARTING, RUNNING THROUGH THE dense undergrowth of the bush. Complete darkness enveloped them; branches switched across their faces; creepers entwined themselves about their feet and sent them time and again sprawling upon the matted earth. When they came out into the trail, they cast a quick frightened glance at the light shining from the clearing, then plunged onward down the gloomy path toward the coast.

On both sides rose an impenetrable wall of jungle; above them clouds were blotting out the stars. The path soon curved to the right, dipped across gullies, and rose at times so abruptly that their speed diminished to a walk. As Tod swung along with Bruce at his heels, he wondered if the natives had yet discovered their flight. Were the voodoo worshippers even now fast upon their trail? No sound, however, followed them. Utter quiet reigned in the bush.

At length the vegetation grew less dense. They passed through groves of acacias and mangoes, crossed hillocks where only grass grew, and at last reached a point where another trail branched off to the right.

Here Tod drew to a halt. "That leads to Brixton's plantation," he said in a hoarse whisper.

Bruce suddenly turned. "What's that?"

Tod lifted his head. Across the stillness of the night drifted the distant roll of a drum. There was no mistaking that beat. It was the great Devil Drum of the voodoo priest. This was not the ceremonial tattoo, however; rather was it a harsh staccato note that rose, fell softly away, and rose again. Tod trembled. In a flash he

understood. A message! The great drum in the clearing was announcing by code the news of their escape.

"Jean must have lost!" Bruce uttered the words in a strange suppressed tone. "They're after us!"

"Everyone is at the meeting," Tod mused hurriedly. "If we can reach the mission trail, we can make the ship before they cut us off. Come on!"

As they started down the new trail, a sound far ahead pulled them up sharply. From the direction of the mission came the throb of another drum. Almost at once other drums took up the answering message. In consternation, the boys listened. They were completely surrounded.

The instant realization that the blacks would soon be closing in on them sent Tod's thoughts whirling. What should they do? Behind them lay the clearing. Ahead, a drum was throbbing out its message. All round them rose those steady notes as though the pulse of the tropic night were beating across the bush.

The fugitives quickly came to a decision. They would push boldly on, making an effort to creep through their pursuers' net and reach the ship that night.

With renewed caution, they went forward. They stopped to listen now and then, but the only noises were the sound of birds fluttering in a thicket as morning approached, and the intermittent beat of those drums which sent their messages flying across the island. Presently they came out on the edge of a canefield where the stalks stood high as themselves.

"We've lost our way!" Tod spoke with something like a groan. "We must have taken the wrong path in the dark."

Going forward to a hillock, they saw across the gently sloping land the charred remains of Brixton's bungalow. A drum was beating somewhere near the beach. Footfalls sounded on the path behind them.

Startled, they plunged into the canebrakes and flung themselves flat on the ground. In silence they peered out

at a group of Negroes who hurried toward the beach. Tod counted twelve vague forms; but he knew there might be more. Others soon followed, beating the grass and making wide detours into thickets. Tod dropped his head to the earth. Would the blacks search the canefield? Was discovery at hand?

Two men broke their way through the canebrakes. A shadow passed close to them, but the man was utterly oblivious of their presence. When silence once more closed down, they pressed on again. Straight across the field they went, making a line northwest for the mission hut. When they came to the scattered shrubs beyond, they halted and looked intently at the dark landscape rising before them. Nothing stirred. Over all lay a brooding peace, broken only by the occasional soft pulsation of a drum. Black clouds, sweeping across the sky, seemed incredibly near them.

A sudden wide flash of lightning illumined the scene. Bruce called out in fear. "Out of sight! Behind us!"

Tod dropped to earth. Another flash gave him a glimpse of a knoll behind them on which he made out the forms of several natives. He felt his heart thud madly. Their pursuers were only fifty yards behind. Thunder, abrupt and incisive, reverberated across the hills.

"Come on," Tod called out. "We'll run for it."

With Bruce following, he set out through the thickets. Then the rain poured down. In a moment, they were completely drenched. The noise was like a steady hiss of shot as the trees and shrubs bent beneath the onslaught. Wet branches cut across their faces, tearing at their eyes, half blinding them. Nevertheless, Tod blessed that tropical squall, for it allowed them to push on with less caution. For another mile they ran with little sense of direction. The impression that they were being steadily, relentlessly followed kept them from slowing down. Splashing across creeks, rushing through wet grass that

waved waist high, darting round thickets of thorny shrubs, on they sped through the night.

The squall at length passed over; stars came out. Now the ground grew vaguely familiar to Tod, and he realized that they were approaching the site of the missionary hut. As they topped a small knoll, he stopped short. His ankle had begun to pain him; every step was becoming a torture. His hand reached out and touched his companion's shoulder. In silence, the two surveyed the land about them.

Ahead of them, natives with flaring torches were circling toward the bush, beating thickets, prowling through the high grass. Tod flung a glance over his shoulder. Other torches flared behind.

"We're cut off!" Bruce shot out in dismay. "They've got us."

Tod felt a sudden belligerent feeling of strength flow through him. Caught? . . . Not yet, by thunder! Quickly his gaze swept across the grass toward the shore line. He saw a fire blazing near the missionary's wharf, with several dark figures moving near it. His gaze passed on to the dim outline of the hill that rose from the shore. There in that clump of bushes at the top was his hiding place. Could they reach it in safety?

His heart sank with sickening suddenness as he took in another fire burning on the hilltop. Against its blaze he made out a dark form standing near a long object from which came a steady throbbing sound. A signal drum! How could they hope to reach their hiding place so close to that watching Negro?

Already the hunters were coming their way. Soon the two would be hopelessly enmeshed in the web of their pursuers. Of a sudden, Tod made up his mind. "We'll crawl up the hillside," he whispered. "There's a good hiding place there."

Bruce turned in dismay. "Up there? We'd never make it. It's too close to that fire."

"That's just why we've got to get there! If we crawl round opposite the fire and reach that dark clump of shrub, we're safe. They'd never suspect us of hiding so close to that drum. Follow me!"

Tod swung down the knoll, ran with a limping gait toward the bottom of the hill, and began climbing. Here the shadows were black; but already the eastern sky was lightening. With a sigh, he realized that all hope of reaching the ship that night had gone. To their right sounded voices. Tod dropped to earth and wriggled forward through the grass, Bruce trailing behind him. With utmost caution, he crawled up toward the glow of the fire.

Soon he made out the Negro watching the pursuers and utterly unconscious of the approach of the boys. In silence, they drew near, turned to the right, and put the thick clump of bushes between them and the fire. Here Tod rose and sped through the grass to the point where the prickly *Sablier* tree stood faintly outlined against the sky. He came to the thicket of shrubs and felt his way within.

When he reached his old refuge in the centre, he dropped exhausted to the damp ground. Bruce crept to his side without a word. Tod parted the branches before him and gazed through the thicket at the fire. Only fifty feet away stood the watching Negro. At his side rested the hollow log fitted with a goatskin. As Tod peered out, the man stepped forward and beat upon the drum with his knuckles. Over the bush rose the deep hum of notes that penetrated the silence with their soft vibrations.

"We're safe here, I think," Tod whispered. "They won't expect us to come this close."

"What did you hide here? Water? I'm as thirsty as a porpoise."

"Yes, there's a canteen here—and food and a machete. I'll dig them up."

Above them the sky grew lighter. A faint dawn, filtering into their refuge, revealed the spot where he had

buried his canvas bag. Tod dug with his bare hands, unearthing the musette and the canteen, still half-filled with water. They ate and drank without a word.

"You sleep, Bruce, and I'll watch," Tod whispered. "I'll wake you about noon."

When Bruce, tired and exhausted, stretched out with his head in his arms, Tod sat upright, listening. Soon he heard the Negro leave the fire and go down the hillside. At the sound, Tod's nervous tension relaxed; his head drooped; he slid to the ground and lapsed into profound slumber. Hours later, he stirred and opened his eyes with a hint of unfathomed apprehension. What had wakened him?

Bruce still slept. The sun had crept into their hiding place, turning the faint green light into a golden haze, drying their thin clothes on their bodies, awakening the cicadas to a rasping afternoon concert. The faint hum of many voices drifted up to the hilltop. Tod crept through the bushes and peered out.

A group of natives were embarking in sloops from the mission jetty, setting out with sails spread toward the low headland beyond. Evidently only the visitors from Maisi Island were leaving, however, for another group of blacks were turning away from the wharf and making for the bush. Tod realized that the plans for the attack on Maisi had gone awry. How could he and Bruce hope to reach the ship at Mirror Bay if the search was again taken up by all the men on the island? What, too, if the *Congo* had made her repairs! Would she not steam out the bay for New Orleans and leave them on San Felipe, helpless and at the mercy of the Papaloi?

Shadows crept across the hills; outside the headlands the sun went down in a furnace blaze. Tod turned back to his companion, where a blue dusk had invaded their refuge.

Bruce opened his eyes and sat up. "You've let me sleep

all day," he said in reproach. "How about your own rest?"

Tod grinned. "I'm afraid I didn't keep watch very well," he admitted; "I fell asleep. But we'll have to start soon—before any black comes up here to the drum. We'll circle the island."

"What! Why, it's nearly forty miles around that way to the ship."

"I know it. But Brixton told me that was the only chance. The blacks will be watching this side. That's how we'll win through."

Bruce turned the thought over in his mind. "How long do you suppose it will take us?"

"There's no telling. We'll travel by night and sleep during the day. There's enough food by being careful; we ought to find water along the way."

"All right." Bruce nodded in agreement. "We'll make it."

Night came on. The two youths crept out into the starlight of the hillside and down into the deep obscurity of the bush. . . . That three-nights' journey around the island to Mirror Bay became a raw wound across Tod's memory, a sharp throbbing pain wherein he and Bruce, hiding by day, moving on by night, stumbled and ran through the grass, through thickets, across gullies, up hillocks, ever keeping to the edge of jungle near the shore. On the last night, they moved in a nightmare world of their own. At times Tod's ankle threatened to give way entirely; but with gritted teeth he pushed on. Once, hearing native women approaching through the darkness ahead, they slipped down to the very shore and dropped into the water. There, thigh deep, they waited till the voices had passed; then on once more they plunged through the night.

They came to a hill where the climbing was difficult, where Tod clutched his companion's shoulder for support.

"You're all in, old chap! We'd better rest a bit."

Tod tightened his hold. "No. We're almost there—we're going on."

Now they were making the rise where a wealth of thorny shrub blocked their way. The boy's head drooped. A mist was closing over his eyes; drumming was loud in his ears. His breath came in gasps.

"Let's stop, Tod!"

"We're going on."

Above the trees, a blood-red moon swung giddily through the sky. Underfoot, the ground was lifting and falling, lifting and falling, as though it were a swaying deck at sea. All about them drums were beating—or was it the roar of a windward surf they heard? . . . Somewhere infinitely far ahead lay a ship that they must reach that night, a ship with food and drink and rest. Rest? . . . Not yet—not yet! . . .

At dawn, two tattered figures emerged from the bush at Mirror Bay. One was a slender youth whose eager glance flashed from a face scratched and bleeding, whose arms supported a companion smaller than himself, a companion who stared ahead with the burning gaze of a tortured person. They staggered across the sandy beach without pausing at the water's edge. Straight into the creeping mass of foam they advanced, their eyes alight with the exultation of victory.

The *Congo* lay in the offing, with a black coil of smoke ascending from her funnel. From her dim outline, a sound washed across to them—the unmistakable rattle of an anchor chain being drawn through the chock to deck.

PART FOUR

FIRE AT SEA

IN DISTRESS

Denton Fruit Co.'s Stmr. *Congo* 3568 tons.

Racing to port with fire in No. 2 hold.

New Orleans Times-Picayune

CHAPTER I

BY RADIO

"CONGO—CONGO!" BRUCE CALLED ACROSS THE WATER WITH HIS HANDS AT his lips. "Captain Barry! Wait—wait!"

To Tod Moran, standing with the foam of the low breakers swishing about his knees, the voice sounded thin and incredibly remote. Through a swimming vision, he glimpsed the bay spread out like a pool of silver in the dawn. The early light wavered, disappeared in a sudden blackness, and wavered again. Far out across that gray expanse lay the shadow of a steamer that momentarily dissolved in a blur. He pulled himself together with an effort and looked again. The *Congo* was still at rest. A small skiff with sail bellied in the breeze was putting forth from her shadow.

"It's the missionary's boat," he tried to say, but his tongue was so thick that no sound came. As he stag-

gered back toward the beach, the ground rushed up and caught him.

He lay flat on the sand, his head pillowed in his arms, his eyes closed, while the ground beneath him tossed from side to side. Every muscle in his body ached with such intensity that the steady throbbing pain in his ankle was merely one of a hundred other aching spots. Someone was coming for them in a boat! He grasped at the thought as a drowning man at a spar in the open sea. The impression entered his consciousness that for hours, for days, for weeks, he had been swimming through deep caverns of the sea where monstrous forms passed in the gloom, where a hollow drumming washed about him in waves of sound, where he choked from lack of air. Now he was floating up to the surface again after an eternity of effort; now again he could breathe in the fresh cool air. The trembling passed from his limbs. He opened his eyes. With tropical suddenness, the sun had risen; the sky blazed with light.

Someone bent above him. "The boat's almost here, Tod," a voice whispered from a far distance. "They probably think it's Brixton who is coming back. Can you walk?"

He sat up with a weary smile. "I feel better. Yes, I can make it."

Bruce helped him to his feet; he stumbled forward, entered the water, and waded out waist deep. There, other hands took hold of him, half lifted him over the gunwale into a swaying skiff. As he sank on a thwart, the drowsy knowledge swept over him that he was once more in the hands of friends.

Dimly he was aware of the missionary's excited voice, of Bruce's languid replies. Forcing his weary lids apart, he looked about. The skiff was slowly sailing out to the steamer, leaving the jungle shore far behind. Next to Mr. Raynor, who sat in the stern with his hands on the tiller, was a Bruce Denton that Tod scarcely recognized.

With hair matted, face dirty and scratched, with dripping clothes clinging in tatters to his body, his friend presented an appearance even more forlorn and strange than when he had attempted to stoke the furnaces that day in the fire room. Yet when Tod saw that Bruce was far from listless, that his dark eyes shone eagerly, he himself grew light of heart. The past dropped astern of the little skiff.

"The *Congo* was ready to pull out," Mr. Raynor said; "I was just leaving when I heard your call."

Tod spoke with an effort. "Aren't you going too?"

"No; I'm returning to my people." The missionary's face lighted up with the radiant smile of an innocent child. "The Papaloi has been badly wounded, and they have sent for me. This is my opportunity. I shall return and help them. I shall not fail this time."

Tod moved on his seat, instantly aware that he was again interested in the life around him. His gaze searched Bruce's face, and there he read the other's unspoken thoughts. Had Black Jean won in his battle with the conjure doctor?

"Have you seen Black Jean?" Bruce asked the missionary.

"You mean your former mess man? No; we haven't seen him. But Captain Barry will never take him back on board. He says the mess man jumped ship, and here he must remain."

Tod leaned forward. "What about the uprising on Maisi?"

"Something went wrong with their plans," Mr. Raynor replied. "Providence stepped in. However, I shall send a report by the first island boat that comes. I want our government to know that the Denton Fruit Company has been sending contraband to these islands."

Bruce moved uneasily on his seat. As his gaze swept out toward the steamer which they were steadily approaching, a slow flush crept up his cheeks.

"Are you certain," Tod put in, "that it's the company that's guilty? Isn't it just this one ship—perhaps only the captain and second mate?"

The missionary swung the tiller slightly to port. "Let the government investigate that. The *Congo* has been unloading arms at Brixton's wharf. That's all I know."

"Brixton is dead," Tod said after a pause. At Mr. Raynor's start of surprise, he went on to tell the story.

"Retribution!" the missionary murmured when the boy had finished. "Look—we're almost there."

From his seat on the thwart Tod faced Bruce. The expression upon his friend's countenance was one that he did not like; while the fear and terror of the bush had vanished, in its place was now a look of hopeless bitterness.

The sun was touching the hills with light; the silver of the bay changed to deep blue. The decks of the *Congo* took shape. With her funnel belching smoke, she was evidently ready for departure. Men moved about her decks; on the bridge a quartermaster hung over the rail. Tod vaguely wondered if Captain Barry would receive them with eagerness, or would he simply accept them on board because of necessity?

The skiff slid up behind the *Congo*. As the port side of the rusty tramp loomed above them, Tod saw several faces peering overside near the Jacob's ladder which had been flung over the bulwark of the after deck.

"Blimey, they're both back again!" shrilled a voice from deck. "The bloomin' blokes are alive!"

A shout went up from the men at the rail, then Tod heard Mr. Sharp's high voice. "Come aboard. We gotta git under way."

"Can you make it up the ladder?" Bruce asked.

"Sure—just watch me." Tod rose with a new sense of vigour.

The side of their skiff grated against the steel hull; the sail flapped languidly. Bruce stepped forward and

grasped a wooden rung of the rope ladder. "You go first," he urged. "Watch your step."

Tod turned to the missionary with a word of thanks, then climbed rung by rung up the ladder. It was more difficult than he had expected; each step was torture; the weight of his body dragged him downward as if leaden hands were clutching him from below. He set his teeth and grimly went on. When almost at the top, he swayed. For a moment, he thought he was about to fall to the skiff below; but unseen hands reached down and pulled him over the bulwarks. At once he was surrounded by a group of men, all cheering him, asking questions, patting him on the back.

"Git away, you blighters!" said a voice at his side. "Let me 'elp 'em below, cawn't yer? 'E's all in."

Tod lifted his head and wiped a heavy hand across his brow. "I'm all right, Toppy," he said. "I'm all right."

Though Tod leaned weakly against the rail, his eyes were glowing with relief. How good the steel decks felt beneath his bare feet. How kindly the faces of the men in the morning light—Toppy's and Jorgenson's and Panama Pete's! How friendly the voices that buzzed about him! By thunder, it was good to be back!

A moment later, Bruce joined him. "Good-bye—and good luck!" he called back to the missionary.

The second mate pushed his way through the little knot of seamen and greeted them in a hearty tone. "We're mighty glad to see you boys back. We're short of men as it is." He reached in an inner pocket and brought forth a small white paper which he proffered Bruce. "This message just came for you by wireless. Captain Barry said to give it to you at once."

Tod looked at him quickly. "Why, I thought I was the only one here, sir, that understood the radio."

The second mate's thin face broke into a smile. "It seems that Mr. Gallardo understands it also. He received the message ten minutes ago. You boys better turn in

at once and get some rest. You look like scarecrows."

"Yes, sir." Tod limped off.

Toppy moved along at his side. "Blimey, Joe Macaroni, I thought yer was a goner." He showed his yellow fangs in a grin of delight. "'Ow did it 'appen those blacks didn't get yer?"

"I'll tell you later." Tod smiled. "Just let me get some eats, a shower, and then sleep. This seems like heaven."

In the firemen's quarters the men crowded about him, but he waved them aside with a weary gesture. "Let me get some rest first."

He saw Bruce Denton climb to his bunk and throw himself down without a word. Tod threw him a searching glance. He drew closer. "Bruce?"

His friend put out his hand in which a white paper was crumpled. "Read it, Tod," he said in a voice of sheer despair.

The boy took the paper and, spreading it out in his hands, read the message:

S. S. *Congo*. BRUCE DENTON:

Sign off at first port and come home. Mind your own affairs and keep silent.

B. H. DENTON.

Bruce stirred; then, turning a stricken face to the boy, he spoke in a listless voice. "You see, old chap, I tried to help and I've only made things worse."

Tod did not reply. He was struggling to make his mind take in the import of that message. What did it mean? Oh, yes. He sank down on a bunk. Bruce's voice, Bruce's glance told the story. That radio message confirmed all that the officers had said, all that Bruce had surmised about his father being connected with this illegal trade with the islands. In their efforts to get at the truth, they had stumbled upon something that sealed their lips more

effectually than anything that Captain Barry or Mr. Sharp could have done to them. And Bruce Denton had suddenly found his little world shattered to fragments about him.

Tod moved on the bunk. He must cheer Bruce up. They'd get a shower and some eats, then rest. Rest? . . . Just let him sleep for one minute—he couldn't think now. As he threw himself flat on the bunk, a wave of darkness swept up and engulfed him.

THE UNKNOWN STRIKES AGAIN

SEATED CROSS-LEGGED ON HIS BUNK WITH A WRITING PAD BEFORE HIM, Tod Moran was intent on the words which he had written. It was after mess the following night; there remained a few minutes of leisure before he must go below to the stokehole for the eight-to-twelve watch.

After a full night's rest, the two youths found themselves little the worse for their experiences on the voodoo island. Bruce Denton now lay in his bunk, looking across at his friend in perplexity. Above them the tropic dusk that would swiftly deepen into night poured down through the open skylight, filling the forecastle with sombre shadows, blurring the opposite tier of bunks, shading the men's high wooden lockers into the deeper obscurity of the bulkhead aft. All round the compartment above the bunks the portholes were luminous with a blue twilight.

Finally, Bruce could contain his curiosity no longer. "What in the world are you up to, old man?" he asked. "I've been watching you ever since I finished with the officers' chow. You write a few words, stare at the deck head for ten minutes, then grab your pencil in a wild rush and write again. What is it—poetry?"

Tod turned to him, aghast at the thought. "No, I'm only using my little gray cells."

"That sounds even worse. What do you mean?"

Tod's eyes shone. Although the firemen's quarters were deserted by all but them, he lowered his voice. "Captain Tom Jarvis of the freighter *Araby* once told me that a problem could be solved simply by using the little gray cells of one's brain. He said that this running around ask-

ing questions did no good. Instead, if you took a paper and pencil and stated your problem, then put down your ideas, followed out your thoughts, you'd finally come to a conclusion that might be right. If you found it wrong, do it over again with your new knowledge." He paused and looked at his written words. "He maintained that it was like weaving a rug—each strand alone means nothing; but if you wove them together in the right manner, they'd make a pattern at last. The correct solution should stare you in the face."

Bruce smiled. "And I suppose your pattern is finished? You've discovered everything, of course."

"Well, I'm beginning to see light," Tod replied. "I've gone over that murder of French Louie, because I'm not satisfied with things as they stand, because my little gray cells tell me that Louie is the key to the problem. Find out who killed him, and you'll find who's the ringleader back of this jinx."

Bruce was becoming interested. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

Tod reached up and switched on a light in the deck head. "First, we'll take Black Jean," he went on, looking at his notes. "Apparently he's been friendly to us; but still that doesn't keep him from playing a part. We're not sure. Remember that one of the seamen reported in the mess room that he caught Black Jean on the boat deck the first night out from New York. That's a point against him. The next night, I also found him there when I went to investigate that noise from above. The mess said he was hiding a friend, taking him to San Felipe."

"Yes—Max," Bruce supplied.

"But we're not certain that the cat was the only stow-away. Couldn't Max have been merely a blind—an excuse?"

Bruce drew nearer. "You mean that the mess man was hiding someone who wanted to get even with Gal-

lardo—a nigger who might have been badly treated on San Felipe? Perhaps—but it's weak, Tod, weak."

"I admit it. We've got to take everything into consideration, though. Black Jean could not have knifed French Louie, because Gallardo watched the mess man's cabin every minute. But this unknown stowaway could have slipped out of the lifeboat, committed the murder, and then have hidden himself in a different place. I've been all over the ship. There's a dozen places where a man could hide—beneath the plates of the shaft alley, in one of the holds, in the crow's nest."

"No, that won't do," Bruce said with a shake of his head. "If anyone was hiding, either he or Black Jean would be sure to make a slip sometime and be discovered. Jean's cat was the only stowaway on board; and Jean wasn't guilty."

Tod smiled. "That's the way my pattern works out, too. I've discarded Black Jean and his actions entirely. We'll go on to the next person. That's Gallardo."

Tod looked intently at his notes. "Gallardo is a cabin passenger and apparently not too friendly with either the skipper or the second mate. He's on his way to San Felipe to see his partner Brixton, who wasn't playing a square game with him. Well, I told Gallardo today that Brixton had been killed by the blacks, and he actually smiled. Smiled! He has accomplished what he wanted. When things quiet down, he can take possession of his plantation or sell it. Did he know that the *Congo* was supplying rifles to the island? Probably not. You may be sure, though, that the captain and Mr. Sharp would soon find out that he was after Brixton—and remember that Brixton was the man who distributed the guns on San Felipe. That brings us to Captain Barry."

"Now you're getting nearer to the murderer," said Bruce, sitting up with renewed interest.

"Yes, I know that you think he's guilty. But I'm not so sure. True, he is guilty of gun-running, but I think

that's all. He doesn't strike me as the murdering kind."

"Don't be too sure," Bruce cut in. "You can't tell by mere impressions. How, for instance, did he learn who I was?"

"Probably by radio from the company. Or he may have seen you at some time in the New York office. Is the captain guilty? We're not sure. Brixton said that the captain and Gallardo were fast friends; yet they didn't appear too friendly when the inquiry was held in the officers' saloon. Still, that inquiry could have been a blind to throw us off the scent. The captain was becoming suspicious of both you and me."

"He gave out that verdict of suicide because he was shielding someone—someone who was in league with him in this illegal trade. He had to stand by his second officer."

"Oh, so that's how your pattern is taking form!"

"Yes; it looks bad for Mr. Sharp, I admit. He was berthed in the cabin next to Gallardo. Wouldn't it have been easy for him to slip next door and do the trick? That would explain why Captain Barry gave out that false verdict of suicide."

Bruce nodded, his arms about his knees. "But why did the body disappear after you came up to sick bay?"

"I've figured that out, too," Tod went on. "Suppose now that Mr. Sharp wanted to stop Gallardo from interfering with Brixton on San Felipe. The first night out from New York, he tries to get into the passenger's cabin but can't make it. The second night fog comes up, he slips in and kills a man in the dark. *He thinks it is Gallardo.*" Tod paused a moment for breath, then continued. "I come up to the boat deck some time later, go to sick bay, and call French Louie. Mr. Sharp is listening in his cabin on the other side of the bulkhead. French Louie! That surprises him. Has he made a mistake? He looks out his port and sees me switch on the light in the hospital cabin and then run for the companionway. He realizes that something is wrong. He slips out and glances in the

open port. There he finds that he has made a terrible mistake. He also finds that he has left the knife—his knife, perhaps—in the body. That would be evidence against him. He realizes that Gallardo is still alive and will be suspicious. So what does he do? He enters—any cabin key would probably fit those locks—and, taking up the body, tosses it overboard. In the dense fog, no one notices."

Tod leaned back against the bulkhead. "Did Mr. Sharp tell the captain what he had done? We don't know; but probably not. Captain Barry, at least, would suspect the truth and give out that verdict. What could Gallardo do then? There wasn't a single clue to point to the guilty man."

Bruce sighed. "Pretty good, old thing; but your pattern is full of holes. First, let's take French Louie. How did Mr. Sharp get the better of him?"

"That's the weak part in the rug," Tod admitted. "Gallardo had given Louie a pistol. Louie was waiting on the alert, suspicious of every sound. His door was locked; most likely he was sitting up in bed. *How was he killed in spite of every precaution?*"

"Do you suppose he fell asleep?"

"Perhaps. He was a coal-passer, and the men say his actions pointed to the fact that this was his first trip to sea. That grinding labour there in the bunkers would wear him out, for he couldn't have been used to it. Yet, would he dare sleep, knowing his danger? I don't think so."

"Your pattern is a little crooked, isn't it?" Bruce smiled. "For instance, why was not another attempt made on Gallardo's life?"

Tod made a rueful face. "I don't know. Perhaps Mr. Sharp became so frightened at his failure that he didn't try again. He'd be certain that Gallardo would expect another attempt."

"And who is this secret agent that Brixton said was aboard?"

Tod frowned. "I've looked over this ship today from one end to another. I don't seem to find any man who fits. There's no one in the seamen's fo'c'sle, I'm sure. But I'm coming back to the second mate. . . . Imagine French Louie waiting in the darkness of Gallardo's cabin. With the door locked, the portholes closed, Louie sits there on the bunk with a pistol in his hand. Could a port have been opened quickly and the knife flung at him? I don't believe so. The darkness would not allow that, let alone the small size of the port. I feel sure that this unknown murderer was inside the cabin when he struck Louie. In that case, he entered as a friend—with Louie's permission. Louie did not suspect him! Who could it have been? *Only an officer!* It was either the captain or the second mate—and my pattern tells me that it was Mr. Sharp."

Bruce nodded slowly. "You may be right; but you have no proof. Mr. Sharp is perfectly safe now. There's not a single fact which would fasten the crime on him. No, old top, you haven't discovered much yet. For instance, why did Mr. Sharp and Captain Barry let us come back on the ship? They seem glad to have us here."

Tod gave his friend a searching glance. "You ought to see the reason for that, Bruce. That radio message has silenced you."

Bruce nodded bitterly. "Yes, I'm through with this jinx. I'm finished."

"No, Bruce, you're not finished yet. I know what you're thinking; but I'm not so sure that you're right. This is the very point where my pattern is shaping itself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Tod slowly, "that the message that Mr. Sharp gave you is not a real one!"

Bruce stared; his eyes lighted up.

"Who gave you that message?" Tod said quickly. "Mr.

Sharp! Who do we believe is guilty? Mr. Sharp! Does it fit into the pattern? It does!"

"Good heavens, Tod!" the other exclaimed. "You've got me going. Am I as simple as all that?"

"Use your little gray cells!" Tod laughed. "But I haven't told you all my proof yet. Doesn't it strike you as strange that the second mate should tell us now that Gallardo understands wireless? If Gallardo really did know something about it, he'd have spent hours with Sparks in the radio shack. Captain Barry would have known of it. Yet the captain has more than once said since the night of the hurricane, that I was the only person on board who understood the radio outfit. No—Mr. Sharp has played too high this time. We'll find out about this message."

Tod looked out at the dark deck. "Sufferin' mackerel it must be almost eight bells! I've got to go on watch."

At that moment Toppo rushed headlong down the steps to the forecabin. "The jinx is workin' again," he shrilled. "Wot yer think 'as 'appened now?" His thin face was radiant with the news of another calamity.

"Well, out with it, Toppo!" Bruce cried. "What is it?"

Toppo leaned upon the table; his voice sank to a whisper. "The bloomin' secon' mate 'as gone—that's wot! The skipper can't find him any place on the ship."

"Gone!" Tod uttered in consternation, as he saw his carefully woven pattern fade before his eyes. "Why, he couldn't have slipped ashore. We haven't seen an island since afternoon."

Toppo grimly nodded. "That's just it. Somebody's got rid of Mr. Sharp like they did French Louie. They've flung the poor bloke overboard! 'E's disappeared!"

THE DOOR IN THE BULKHEAD

"THE BLOOMIN' BLOKE IS A GONER! SOMEBODY DONE 'IM IN."

"Yah—the jinx! It made him jump overboard."

Tod Moran slammed shut a furnace door of number one boiler, touched the force draught check, and swung about to rest for a moment beneath the ventilator opening. Although Toppy and Swede Jorgenson, during the watch below, had discussed nothing but the sudden disappearance of the second mate, Tod had not joined in their conjectures. What could he say to the little cockney's story of a black cat with gleaming eyes which he had seen early in the evening on the poop, or the tale of one of the seamen who claimed to have beheld a bitter struggle in the twilight on the boat deck, but, when rushing to the spot, found nothing there except a scrawny cat which had slipped past him and vanished into thin air? By morning, Tod knew, other tales equally incredible would be circulating through the ship.

Yet no one was more puzzled than himself. This second disappearance, coming as it did just when he had found his pattern weaving itself into a whole, now destroyed all his work. If Mr. Sharp had been guilty of French Louie's death, how could one reconcile that with this new development? No; he had woven his strands with an unsteady hand or mind. Mr. Sharp evidently was not the criminal. Who, then, could it be?

"Joe Macaroni, we need some coal!" Toppy called out above the draught of the furnaces.

Tod turned to the bunker entrance. "All right—watch my fires." He climbed the slanting plates into the dark bunkers, picked up the iron barrow, and wheeled it for-

ward. They were now drawing the forward bunker on the starboard side, next to the bulkhead beyond which lay number two hold. As he drove the shovel into the pile of coal, the dust flew up into his eyes, his nose, his mouth, closing about him like a fog. Suddenly he stopped and stood still. A strange new odour like chemicals smote his nostrils. Instantly into his mind rushed the thought of fire. He had often heard the chief growling about the quality of coal taken on at Hoboken; he had been warned, too, by the other firemen to watch for signs of spontaneous combustion in the bunkers. Reaching down, he touched the coal. It was warm and moist. He picked up his shovel and dug deep into the pile. Finding that no smoke rose, he breathed easier.

He picked up his barrow and, shoving it along the plates, dumped the contents down the chute to the stoke-hole. When he returned for another load, his eyes settled upon the watertight door in the bulkhead. A light burning dimly down the alleyway revealed the narrow door, three feet long, and opening about a foot above the plates of the flooring. Something made him leave his barrow and approach the dark bulkhead. He put out his hand and touched the steel. His hand automatically jumped back; a little cry escaped his lips. The door was fiery hot.

Tod stood there in amazement, till full realization swept over him. He touched the door again carefully. There was no mistake—a fire was burning the cargo of number two hold.

Tod's hand trembled. Was it possible that fire could reach such headway without anyone discovering it? In that hold, he knew, were stowed the rifles and ammunition which the ship had failed to unload at Brixton's plantation. How long had it been burning? He listened; but the only sounds were the scrape of shovels and the slam of furnace doors. He rushed down toward the stoke-hole. "Topsy," he called. "Topsy!"

"Wot yer want!"

"Come here—quick!"

A moment later, they were both at the watertight door.

"Feel the bulkhead, Toppy. What's it mean?"

Toppy drew back his hand with a sharp cry of pain.

"Gawd strike me blin! The ship's afire!"

"Are you sure?"

Toppy gave a moan. "I knew it—blarst me 'ide if I didn't! This is the end fer us. I won't never see London——"

Tod cut him short. "I'll get the second. Don't say anything."

He ran down to the stokehole, flung himself around the boiler into the tunnel, and reached the engine room, where the second engineer stood at his station near the dials. Tod raised his voice above the hum of the engines. "I wish you'd come into the bunkers, sir. Something's wrong."

The engineer glanced at his dials, motioned to an oiler to take his place, and turned to the stokehole. Tod saw that the hands of the chronometer on the board pointed to eleven-thirty—almost the end of his night watch.

"Now, what's wrong?" the second engineer asked roughly as he led the way into the bunkers.

"The forward bulkhead, sir. It's hot. There's a fire in number two hold."

Without a word, the man sprang past Toppy and wrenched at the steel door. He swore as his hands touched the hot metal. The door swung out and at once a column of dark smoke puffed into their faces. Quickly the man swung his weight against the door and clamped it shut. When he turned, his face was pale in the dim light.

Toppy stepped backward. "I knew it—I knew it," he quavered. "We'll all be drowned or burnt. And there's only one lifeboat left."

"Shut up," snapped the second. "Run up to the chief engineer's cabin and rouse him. I'll wake up the skipper."

Toppy fled down to the stokehole and disappeared up the fiddley ladder. "Get back to your furnaces," the second said shortly. "Lucky you found that. We may be able to smother it—or drown it out." He vanished into the engine room as Tod followed down to the fire room.

"What's the matter, Kid?" asked Jorgenson, swinging open a furnace door.

"A fire—in number two hold."

Swede Jorgenson stood in the fierce glare of the furnace, his damp hair plastered on his forehead, his face flushed with the heat, his naked torso streaming with sweat. "Aw, that ain't so bad," he said in his slow drawl, "I've seen fires on ships afore this." Imperturbable as always, he went calmly about his work.

Tod reached for the long slice bar and drove it against the clinker of his port fire. It flared against him with an intense heat, making the sweat stand out upon his body, burning his eyes, his chest, his arms. Was such a fire as this burning in the cargo hold? Could they hope to smother such a blaze? Impossible. Yet they had only one lifeboat and the captain's gig on the poop deck; and all day only a single ship had been seen upon the horizon. He threw down his slice bar and picked up his shovel.

He saw the chief engineer rush through the stokehole and into the bunkers. Captain Barry came a moment later. Tod peered in after them. He made out their forms against the bulkhead, opening the door. Evidently the fire was more serious than they had first thought, for they hurried back with muttered imprecations and disappeared above.

Toppy entered hurriedly from the engine room. "It ain't no use keeping our fires up," he declared. "The bloomin' ship's goin' down!"

"Aw, get busy!" Tod spoke sharply. "Wait till you

get orders." Suddenly he lifted his head and listened. From the decks above came the abrupt beating of a bell, the cry of voices, the rush of feet.

Toppy trembled. "Listen to that anvil chorus," he shrilled. "I'm goin' on deck." He ran for the fiddley and climbed like a monkey up the ladder.

Tod did not move. On deck, he knew, the fire signal had been given to rouse all hands. Would they man the pumps and turn the hose down the ventilator into number two hold? Was number one hold also afire? He glanced across at Swede Jorgenson and saw that the fireman was busy at his furnace. Tod swung over to Toppy's fires. "We'll have to keep these going, too," he called to Jorgenson.

As the man nodded, Tod gave him a searching look. The big fireman was apparently never startled or disturbed out of his accustomed routine. Murder, hurricane, fire at sea—he accepted all these as part of his daily work. If the worst came, Tod could imagine him calmly tying on a life belt and jumping overboard, his bovine eyes merely closed against the salt brine. Tod sighed. At times a lack of imagination was certainly to be envied.

Steps sounding on the iron rungs of the fiddley ladder made him look up. Toppy jumped to the plates of the flooring and eyed them with a slightly sheepish look. "The bloomin' horfficers are trying to smother the fire. Blimey, they won't be able to do it! The deck is piping 'ot!" Without another word of explanation, he took his place before his fires, working with renewed energy.

At ten minutes to twelve the second engineer struck one bell in the engine room for the watch to change. Immediately, Panama Pete and two other men filed down the fiddley ladder to relieve the firemen. Tod climbed wearily to the starboard alleyway and went out to the fore deck. Two seamen guarded the hatch, ready to give warning of a sudden increase of the fire in the hold. Tod looked about him in surprise. Was not Captain Barry making any

effort to quell the fire in the cargo? He approached the seamen and learned that it was evidently useless to attempt to quench the blaze below deck; the ventilator had been stuffed full of rags and canvas in an effort to smother the fire. Tod turned away. The *Congo* was steaming north toward the Gulf beneath a star-strewn sky that seemed incredibly near. Above stretched the quivering arch of the Milky Way, with a black ribbon of smoke trailing across it. The sea was calm. Off the port beam appeared the lights of a passing steamer.

Tod went down the alleyway to the after deck, where he glimpsed a figure standing against the bulwarks gazing overside. Something in the erect carriage made him pause. "Bruce?"

"Yes." The tone was listless.

Tod joined his friend at the rail. "It's after midnight. Why aren't you in your bunk?"

"I couldn't sleep. I've been thinking—trying to figure things out."

"Any news of Mr. Sharp?"

Bruce turned swiftly toward him. "Not a sign! He's gone—vanished just like French Louie. Tod, what's it mean?"

"It means we've got to begin our reasoning over again. I have the feeling that my pattern is taking shape. I can't see clearly yet, but let me get busy once more. There are things happening on this old tramp that we know nothing about. That fire now——"

"It was started on purpose," Bruce cut in. "It's in number two hold—just where the cargo of rifles and ammunition is stowed that they couldn't unload at Brixton's plantation. Captain Barry doesn't dare return to port with that evidence in the hold."

Tod nodded in the darkness. "Yes; but the only way he could get rid of all the evidence would be to let the ship burn—go down. Still, I don't think he'd purposely

start a fire in a forward hold with the ammunition so near. It's too dangerous."

"Nothing is too dangerous for anyone on this ship," Bruce snorted. "Suppose the ship does go down! Aren't there islands all around us, and other ships passing every few hours?"

"It might be too late even then," Tod reminded him, "—if the government agent is secretly aboard."

"But is he really here? We can't seem to find him. I don't believe he ever signed on."

"If he didn't, then the skipper has won. Captain Barry can walk off at New Orleans—unless the ship burns down."

"I hope she does!" Bruce said bitterly.

"Oh, cheer up. Merely because the second mate has disappeared is no reason to think that all our ideas are wrong. That radio message, now. I'm sure it was a fake. No one understands the wireless outfit."

"Don't be too sure. Look up there." Bruce gazed toward the boat deck where the radio shack was brilliantly illuminated. "There's someone in there, all right."

Tod's quick glance swept the silent, deserted decks. "Let's go above and see who it is. You can make the excuse of asking about your message."

Without another word, they crossed in the darkness to the ladder, climbed to the promenade deck, then swung up the companionway to the boat deck above. A faint light shone from the wheel-house window; aft of them, two portholes of the radio shack showed that whoever was in the operator's place was there openly, with the knowledge of the captain.

All was silent except for the soft throb of the engines drifting up the skylight and the hiss of the funnel overhead. Tod led the way to the radio shack, where he put up his hand in warning. From within came the slow measured tap of the radio key.

Tod listened for several minutes, then turned to his

friend with a sharp whisper. "Bruce, that's no message going out. That's not the code!"

His companion grasped his arm. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. Whoever is in there is a fake." There was a glad ring in Tod's voice. "Oh, we almost let them put one over on us there. They thought we'd let up."

"Let's go in," Bruce whispered.

At Tod's nod, he knocked upon the door. For a moment the tap of the key continued, then a voice said, "Come in."

Bruce swung open the door and the two boys entered. Seated in the chair before the radio outfit was Señor Gallardo, dressed as always in an immaculately tailored suit. His thin dark face was turned to them; his black eyes flashed as he regarded them in silence.

Bruce stepped forward. "We wanted to ask about that message which came from my father."

Señor Gallardo smiled with a flash of his white teeth. "Oh, yes, I took that message. Evidently your paternal parent wishes you to come home at once."

Tod felt a feeling of anger stir within him. Something in the tone, so cool, so incisive, told him that here was a man of unfathomed strength and hidden powers. "You just sent out a message, Mr. Gallardo?" Tod asked.

The man gave him a quick searching look. His eyes narrowed. "Yes. But does that concern you?" There was a note of menace in the voice.

"I was wondering—that's all."

Señor Gallardo rose suddenly to his feet. His tall figure approached the boys. "You don't believe me—no? Well, I've got just one word for you. Careful—understand?"

Bruce touched Tod's arm. "Come on—let's go." His tone was one of entreaty.

Tod shot him a quick glance.

"Don't you realize who he is?" Bruce uttered breathlessly. "He's the secret service agent!"

Tod turned an incredulous face to Señor Gallardo. The man eyed them narrowly for a second; then he slowly nodded. "You two fools," he snapped out at last, "keep quiet about this. Not a word to anyone—understand? Yes—I'm a government agent. That message you just heard was sent in the secret code of the United States Navy!"

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE SHAFT ALLEY REVEALED

FOR THREE DAYS THE CONGO PUSHED HER BLUNT NOSE STEADILY UP THE Latitudes toward the Gulf; and for three days the crew tried in vain to smother the fire in number two hold. Captain Barry, it was said, was endeavouring to race to port, to make the Denton Fruit Company's wharf at New Orleans, where fire boats would effectually take care of the roaring inferno below deck. The monotonous routine of a ship at sea continued as usual; yet a sense of impending disaster, impalpable as a mist, pressed down upon the rusty tramp. No one could cross the fore deck without scorching the soles of his shoes; and, although the men had tightly covered the ventilator that aired the hold, wisps of smoke issued from it in defiance of all their efforts. The acrid odour of burning cargo enveloped the ship from stem to stern.

Tod Moran found his four-hour watch in the stokehole an ever-increasing nightmare; for during every spare moment he toiled in the darkness like a mole, emptying the bunkers next to the forward bulkhead. Crawling to deck at eight bells, black and dust-laden, weary and worn, he often glimpsed Bruce Denton, in a white coat with brass buttons, serving chow in the officers' saloon. It was a silent Bruce, however. Only the possibility that the race to port might yet be lost seemed to cheer him up. Tod knew that his friend hoped the ship would go down, taking with it all the incriminating evidence of its contraband cargo.

This was a point that again threw Tod's pattern askew. Why was Captain Barry trying to save the ship if he was so deeply immersed in this illegal cargo carrying? Would

he not, in order to shield himself, rather scuttle the ship and allow her to sink with all her cargo? Yet Tod divined that the little master of the *Congo* was too much a seaman to be guilty of the worst phases of barratry on the high seas. The captain had become merely a shadow of his former self. Irritable, nervous, and hollow-eyed, sagging under the tremendous burden of suspense, he paced the bridge at all hours of the night and day, barking out his orders in a rasping voice that no longer carried beyond the stanchions of the rail. What were his thoughts? Tod wondered. Was he, too, in the dark as to the cause of Mr. Sharp's inexplicable disappearance?

At times, Bruce chided Tod about the weaving of his pattern. Was it shaping itself again? Tod admitted that so far it was a complete failure; the vanishing of the second mate had torn it to shreds. Yet as the days slipped astern, he grew more certain that, if one was to get to the bottom of the mystery of this old tramp, it was not by accepting the strange occurrences, as did Bruce, with a languid interest, or as did Toppy, with his belief in some remote supernatural cause. No—Tod was certain that only a clear intelligence could ultimately solve the problem, an intelligence that would refuse to accept the surface indications but instead would delve beneath.

Of all the men on the ship, Gallardo alone appeared to be unmoved. In a suit of spotless white duck, he strolled forward to speak to the deck crew, hung over the rail amidships to watch stray bits of seaweed and the little Portuguese men-of-war float by, or came aft to smoke with the firemen on the poop deck. Tod realized that, beneath the cabin passenger's exterior of cheerful serenity, there probably lurked a mind that registered everything about him, a mind that was gathering bit by bit conclusive evidence against the *Congo's* officers. Here in Gallardo, the boy reflected, the government had found a man of unusual ability. There was an air of self-possession and

indomitable courage about him that no casual observer could possibly miss.

By chance, the two met one evening on the after deck. It was the fourth day out from San Felipe, and the ship was quietly steaming northwest with the sun going down in violent splendour across the waters of the Gulf. Gallardo was seated on number four hatch, and as Tod passed, the man called to him in his deep, quick tones.

"You wanted me?" Tod asked as he drew near.

"Take a seat, Moran." Gallardo lowered his voice. "How are things going? Have you two boys kept secret your knowledge about my position here?"

Tod dropped to the canvas-covered hatch. "I haven't said a word to anyone."

"And young Denton?"

"Oh, he's too busy working to talk much." Tod moved his hands uneasily. He glanced to leeward where a distant splotch of smoke on the horizon foretold the appearance of another ship. Tod was wondering if the secret agent suspected that in Bruce he now faced an enemy? Did he also suspect that Tod himself would not care to help?

"I'm drawing the net tighter every day," Gallardo went on, as he looked abstractedly toward the bulwarks. "As long as you keep to the firemen's fo'c'sle you and your friend are perfectly safe."

"Safe?" Tod echoed. "What do you mean?"

Gallardo leaned closer. "I'm merely warning you not to get too curious—without letting me know. We have aboard this tub one of the cleverest criminals of modern times."

Tod felt an uncontrollable shiver pass through him. "And you know him?" he at length brought out.

"No—I haven't been able to lay my hands on him yet!" Gallardo turned his smooth-shaven face to the youth beside him; his black eyes gleamed with sudden feeling. "But I am certain that someone is hiding on this ship. That's the man I want to get! Yet I feel that he has help

from some other person, some person who brings him food. I'm watching—waiting till I catch them at it. Then I'll nab them both."

"The captain?" Tod hazarded.

Gallardo laughed shortly. "Captain Barry is frightened to death. He's not been himself since his second officer disappeared. He can't understand. No—I'm after bigger game. My net will be ready to draw tight before we go up the river to New Orleans!"

"The fire's under control, then? We can get there in time?"

"I think so. At least the cargo in number one hold is still intact. Well, I'll see you later. Remember—not a word!" He rose and went forward to the port alleyway.

Tod followed him with his eyes. Somehow he felt a renewed sense of courage now that the whole affair was in the hands of so capable a man. He sighed. Of course, he and Bruce should have known that the government would not remain long in ignorance of this illegal trade with the islands.

Seven bells sounded on the bridge, and he went aft to prepare for his watch. The grinding labour in the stoke-hole soon forced all thought of Gallardo and the unknown stowaway from his mind. Not until he climbed the fiddley ladder at midnight with Toppo and Swede Jorgenson did the subject recur. The three firemen had gone into the messroom for a sandwich and cup of coffee when Toppo announced a discovery.

"The jinx cat is 'ere again," he said with a gloomy nod as he munched the thick sandwich he had made.

Tod listened in surprise, but his questions soon elicited the fact that Toppo had only heard more rumours from the seamen. "It don't make no difference," Toppo snarled. "The bloke that told me 'as seen that cat again."

"That's superstition, Toppo."

"Aw, cut it, Joe Macaroni! Yer talk like yer college frien'."

Tod laughed as he rose. Toppo followed him, but the Swede remained behind, still eating great hunks of bread and sausage. Moonlight flooded the decks with a silver radiance; a faint breeze sang in the rigging. A long black ribbon of smoke trailing above them made Toppo curse the inefficient firemen who had taken over the watch. Off the port beam, the moon made a glittering path across the water; to starboard the distant lights of a steamer were drawing near.

The two firemen had almost reached the door of their quarters when the little cockney sharply caught his breath. "Gawd blimey—there it is!"

At the intensity of the tone, Tod swung about. In the moonlight he perceived Toppo's face distorted with fear; his eyes stared up at the poop deck. Trembling, the little fireman raised his hand and pointed. "Look—look!"

Tod Moran, following his glance, discerned clearly outlined against the luminous sky the dark silhouette of the wooden rail with a cat sitting upon it. In the stillness of the night, Tod heard his pulse beat loudly in his ears. That vision above was no trick of the imagination. On the rail of the poop sat a scrawny cat.

"Wot'd I tell yer?" Toppo quavered. "Ain't it the truth?"

As Tod moved forward toward the steps to the poop, Toppo shrilled behind him, "Where yer goin'? Come back 'ere, Joe Macaroni! Don't—don't go near it."

Tod raised his voice. "Max! Max, come here!"

But was it Max? At the sound of his voice, the cat turned two shining eyes down at them; then abruptly it disappeared. A second later Tod saw a black shadow flit down the steps and vanish toward the hatches.

"Come on below, Joe Macaroni. Let's turn in."

"No—I want to find that cat."

"Find it?" Toppo laughed nervously. "Can a bloke find a bloomin' ghost?"

"But I'm going to."

Toppo's face grew grim. "No, yer don't! Remember French Louie and Mr. Sharp! They got curious, didn't they? An' wot 'appened? Gone—overboard!"

Tod meditated a moment. Was Toppo right? Was it dangerous to attempt to find that cat? Would Mr. Gallardo approve? A second later he turned to the little cockney and lowered his voice. "Just let me look about here—that's all. The cat must be behind those hatches."

"Yer won't find nothin'."

Toppo was right; no cat remained on deck. Yet Tod doubted if the beast had gone forward to the alleyways where lights burned in the deck heads. Where then had it gone? Between the two after hatches he stopped short. Just aft of the mast that braced the derrick booms was a small hatchway leading down into the shaft tunnel. The door of this was open.

Tod gazed in silence, considering. This small door, he knew, was always kept closed. Who had opened it? Had the cat slipped down those wooden steps which led below to the shaft alley? A faint light gleamed down there. He listened for a moment, and, hearing no sound, began descending the precipitous steps.

His movements brought a wail from Toppo. "Blimey—I'll never see yer again if yer go, Joe Macaroni! Come back!"

"Keep still, Toppo."

"Strike me blime if I'll let yer go!"

"But I am," Tod returned in an impatient whisper. "Come on down with me."

"Me? Oh, Gawd!"

"All right, stay there, then. But keep quiet!"

Tod dropped down the steps to the steel plates of the tunnel. He looked around. A single bulb burned halfway down the narrow alleyway. Along the full length of one

side ran the shaft, turning with a soft rhythmical throb in its bearing. On the other shadowy side were piled the odds and ends of engine-room gear which were stored here for use in case of need. Between these a narrow walk extended to the far end where a doorway let in the steady hum of the engines.

Tod stood there in silence, pondering the problem of the cat's disappearance. He was ready to laugh at Toppy's fears. His own experiences on San Felipe had brought him the full realization of the part that superstition played in the lives of the multitude. Since the world began, a few men, invested as the Papaloi was with the authority and power of a supernatural force, had succeeded in holding the ignorant in thrall. Well, by thunder, he wasn't a slave to such ideas! Any intelligent mind could pierce that haze of loose thinking, muttered incantations, and hocus-pocus. Sometimes, too, a clever person, although not believing, himself, used this same knowledge to further his own ends. Such a person had enveloped the *Congo* in an air of deepest mystery. Find that person, Tod told himself, and he'd find the truth about the jinx.

Was the cat an ally of the unknown person—the man whom Mr. Gallardo suspected of being hidden on the ship? Could they both be hiding below the steel plates? There was plenty of room, he knew, down there in the bilge. As he stood considering, he saw the cat again. It emerged from the shadows of the ropes to port of him walking toward him with a mincing gait.

Tod was certain he recognized that form. "Max—come here," he whispered.

The black beast drew near and quietly mewed. When it rubbed its back against his shoe, he was no longer left in doubt. It was Max—Max whom he had last seen on the voodoo island with the snake in his mouth. The uncanny creature purred in delight.

"Boy, is that yo'?" A voice, deep and vibrant, spoke from the shadows.

Black Jean! Black Jean was hiding in the bilge. Tod's thoughts moved swiftly. Was the mess man the unknown person for whom Gallardo was searching? Was he the man who was guilty of both crimes on board? No—surely it could not be he!

Tod saw a steel plate slowly lift and Black Jean's face appear. "Boy, git me somethin' to eat!"

The Negro's eyes shone in the dim light of the electric bulb. "Ah had to run from San Felipe. Those low-down niggers turned against me when Max killed their voodoo snake. What could Ah do? Ah couldn't come aboa'd here if the skipper knowed it. So Ah swims out one night with Max on mah head, climbs up the anchor chain, and slips down here. Ah meant to hide only fo' a day till we left San Felipe behin'. But that night somethin' happened."

Tod knelt down and pulled the plate aside. The Negro's voice was so amiable, so full of human kindness, that he immediately found his old firm belief in Jean returning. "Go on," he urged. "What happened?"

"Ah was crossin' the aftah deck, tryin' to sneak into the mess room an' git some eats fo' Max an' me, when Ah sees a fight near the bulwarks."

"A fight!"

"Yassah! Mr. Sharp was fightin' with someone theah. Then Ah sees this man lift the second mate and throw him overboard. Ah sneaked back then. Ah didn't know who that man was; but Ah sho' knew that the skipper would say Ah done it."

"But this unknown person? Could it be the Old Man himself?"

Black Jean shook his head. "No, sah, it wa'n't the little cap'n! The man was too tall."

"But if it wasn't the captain, who was it?"

The Negro's reply was barely audible. "It was French Louie's ghost."

Tod drew back. French Louie! That was absurd.

"Yassah," Jean continued; "we got things on this ole tub that Ah don't like nohow. When Ah seen that fight, Ah didn't dare come out."

"Get back, Jean," Tod said quickly. "The oiler may be coming here on his rounds. I'll bring you some eats."

"All right, boy." Black Jean grasped Max and seated himself on a cross beam of the bilge some three feet below. Tod slid the steel plate back in place, then went above.

"Wot yer find, Joe Macaroni?" Toppo was waiting, breathless with apprehension.

"Nothing, Toppo. You were right."

The little cockney sighed in relief. "Wot'd I tell yer? Well, I'm goin' ter turn in. It ain't safe on these decks at night."

Tod made three sandwiches, took a large cup of coffee, and, going aft, waited till he heard the oiler make his rounds in the shaft alley and retire to the engine room; then he took the food below to Jean. He hurried to deck again, oblivious of the Negro's words of thanks. He wanted to think over this new development.

Seating himself on the after hatch, he considered his problem anew. He didn't doubt Black Jean's words for an instant; yet would the officers believe him too? Probably not. Jean's suggestion of seeing French Louie had sent Tod's thoughts racing. French Louie! Why had he not given the coal-passer more thought? Was that the missing strand?

On the instant he rose and went to his quarters. In the glow of the green night light, Toppo was tumbling into his bunk. Tod approached him, asking in a whisper, "Toppo, which locker belonged to French Louie?"

The little fireman pointed it out—the lower locker in the far corner. "But you won't find nothin' there," Toppo said. "The Old Man came down after all his clothes."

Tod felt his heart sink. "Everything gone?"

"There's an' old coat left hanging ter that after port.

The skipper didn't see it. But it ain't good fer nothin', Joe Macaroni. I looked it over."

Nevertheless, Tod threw open the locker which had once been French Louie's. Nothing was there. After that, he reached up and took the coat from the iron clamp of the porthole. As his hands touched the garment, he had the sensation that at last he was coming upon the final clue that would point to this unknown person. Who really was French Louie? Why had he not thought to investigate more fully this phase of the strange occurrences aboard the old tramp? Quickly his fingers felt in the pockets. Nothing there but a tobacco pouch and a pipe. They, certainly, threw no new light upon the owner. In one corner of the coat, however, he encountered something sewed flat between the lining and the outer cloth, something that crinkled under his touch. Was it paper money? Occasionally seamen, he knew, sewed their wages in their clothes for safety.

Suddenly he froze to the spot. A terrific explosion detonated from the fore deck. A shudder went through the ship. Tod dropped the coat and rushed to Bruce's bunk. He shook his friend by the arm. "Get up, Bruce—get up!"

Toppy had already jumped to the floor, speechless for once in his life. He stood there in a daze while Tod roused Swede Jorgenson.

"What's wrong, Kid?" the Swede drowsily murmured.

No need to answer; no need for words here. For a great light was blazing over the sea. Glowing embers, sweeping in fiery sparks over the midships structure, met the men as they rushed half clad to deck.

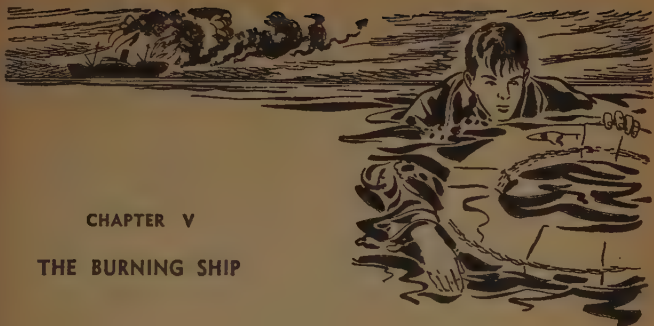
"She's blown up!" Bruce cried. There was a note of joy and relief in his voice.

"Get dressed, quick!" Tod shot at him. "Don't you see you're the last man here?"

Apparently, Bruce was oblivious to his own immediate

danger. As he slid to the floor, he spoke in a tone of suppressed excitement. "We've won, Tod—won over Gallardo! This is the end of his evidence."

Tod was not listening. He was urging his friend up the three iron steps to deck.



CHAPTER V

THE BURNING SHIP

OVER THE SEA GLOWED A RUDDY LIGHT THAT MADE EACH OBJECT ON deck as visible as though it were daytime. As Bruce and Tod rushed forward, sparks fell all about them. Dense clouds of smoke overhead obscured the moon and stars. A long shrill blast of the ship's whistle smote Tod's ear drums with its menacing note. The fire call was ordering every man to his station.

Bruce pulled up short near number three hatch. "This is my station," he jerked out.

Tod ran on. His place, he knew, was by number one hydrant on the fore deck between the two hatches, and he also knew that his chances of reaching it were slim indeed. The starboard alleyway was thick with smoke that issued from the stokehole fiddley. His eyes smarted; he choked on the fumes.

Panama Pete, emerging from the engine-room entrance, blocked his path. "The forward bulkhead is stove in," he announced grimly. "The bunker coal is burning. The chief just stopped the engines."

For the first time Tod became aware of the fact that the ship was losing headway, that the deck beneath him no longer vibrated to those steady throbs. The iron heart of the *Congo* had stopped beating. In its place, however, there came the sound of crackling flames. He passed the

fiddley entrance with closed eyes and felt his way forward. At the point where the alleyway opened upon the fore deck, the scorching heat brought him to a sudden halt.

The hatch cover of number two hold had been blown off, and now, rising from it as from a yawning furnace mouth, were leaping flames that reached high into the night. Light more intense than that of the tropic sun enveloped the ship. Tod edged backward into the alleyway to escape from the blistering heat. It was impossible for anyone to pass that blazing inferno to the forward hydrant. He realized, too, that the men caught in the seamen's forecandle could not possibly make their way aft to the lifeboat or to the gig; they could only don life belts and jump overboard, trusting that they would be picked up by one of the boats.

With a muttered curse, the boatswain drew up to Tod's side. "Get up to your boat station, Kid," he urged. "We can't put out that blaze."

Tod turned back to the ladder and ran up to the boat deck. His lifeboat, he knew, was the starboard boat; and abruptly the realization swept over him that it had been lost overboard on the night of the hurricane. He took his place there near the empty cradle and davits with several other men who looked about blankly at each other. Already the devouring flames, driven aft by the breeze, were licking at the wooden superstructure. The bridge was afire, entirely at the mercy of the volcanic heat so close to it.

"Abandon ship!"

Tod started at the abrupt command from the captain, standing in the wheel-house door with a white sheet of flame behind him. Tod looked about. The port lifeboat, under an officer's orders, was being swung out on its davits, ready for lowering. What were the men of the missing starboard boat to do?

Captain Barry strode toward them. "You men divide up!" he rasped out in a voice that yet managed to be

calm. "The forward half of this group get in the port boat; the rest go aft to the gig on the poop!"

Toppy moved up to Tod's side. "Come on, Joe Macaroni," he said hoarsely. "We'll git in the port lifeboat."

"No," Tod replied quickly. "I'm going aft to the gig."

"Blimey, this lifeboat is safer."

"I'm going aft!"

"Righto! Then I'll go with yer."

The two hurried down the companionway, passed the officers' cabins, and dropped down the ladder to the after deck. Tod could see several men on the poop, working with methodical precision, at the gig. Tod's thoughts had turned to Black Jean. Had the mess man come above yet? Or was he still in the darkness of the bilge in the shaft alley, uncertain of what was happening on deck?

Tod pulled up short between the two hatches and stooped above the little door leading downward.

"Come on, Joe Macaroni! Blimey, yer better hurry!"

"I'm going down here to call Black Jean."

"Wot?"

"Yes—to call the mess man. Go ahead, Toppy! I'll be with you in a minute."

In the flaring light, Toppy stood wide-eyed. "'Ave yer gone batty? Come on!"

Tod was already sliding down the steps to the dark shaft tunnel. He sniffed at the smell of smoke drifting aft from the engine room. All was silent in the alley. No steady hum came now from the shaft in its bearings. No light burned in the deck head.

"Jean!" he called. "Jean!"

From the darkness an agonized voice greeted him. "Boy, Ah'm scared to death. Is the ship afire?"

"Hurry, Jean. Get on deck. We're leaving in the gig on the poop."

As he led the way to deck, he was met by Gallardo, who regarded him in surprise. When the man saw the

tall form of the Negro emerge with Max in his arms, he stopped suddenly. "Oh, so that's who is hiding, is it?" His voice was harsh with anger. "You've been helping him, I suppose."

Black Jean trembled. "Ah wanted to git away from San Felipe."

"Well, you just come along with me. I'll see that you're locked up."

"What for?" Tod cried with suppressed anger.

Gallardo's eyes narrowed to mere slits. "For the crimes aboard this ship! I've got my man at last."

"Go on with him, Jean," Tod said quickly to the Negro. "We can settle this later."

As the three started aft, Tod saw Topsy leaning over the rail of the poop deck above them. "Hurry up, Kid. We got ter leave before she blows up again."

Tod stopped at the door of the firemen's quarters. "Get in the boat, Topsy. I've forgotten something."

"Blimey, wot now?"

"A coat."

"Gawd strike me blinel!" Topsy turned to Black Jean and Gallardo, who were climbing the ladder. "'E's gone batty."

Tod gave a quick glance about him. Now, if any unknown person was hiding on the ship, he would surely be driven forth. The after deck was deserted, and as he took in the faces of the men on the poop, he saw no unfamiliar form.

He dived down the three steps to his quarters. The open door was brilliantly outlined upon the after bulkhead by the flickering light. On the floor of the far side lay French Louie's coat, which he had dropped. A vague reason which he could not define urged him to get that coat. He knelt and wrenched at the lining. What was hidden there?

His hands came to a sudden stop. A sharp sense of fear welled up within him. On the wall before him was out-

lined the gleaming doorway, and in it now was silhouetted the dark form of a man. Tod stiffened. Directly behind him, he knew, someone was peering in at him, someone who remained silent and intent upon his actions. It wasn't Toppy, he instantly realized, for the little cockney would have called out to him. Was this the shadow of the unknown criminal? Did this man suspect that even at such a moment of danger, with the ship afire, with the boats leaving, Tod was still at work on the mystery?

Tod swung up the coat and, without turning his head, slipped it on, as if it were his own. After that, he rose and turned on his heel. The doorway was empty.

He rushed up the steps and looked about. No one was there. The crackle of flames was loud in his ears. Looking forward, he saw that the bridge and wheel house were burning with a fierce red gleam. The port lifeboat had disappeared overside. He sprang for the ladder to the poop deck. There he was greeted with the whining of ropes through the falls. The gig, too, had gone.

He was alone on the burning ship.

Turning back for a lifebuoy that hung outside the firemen's forecastle, he suddenly realized that the deck had a perceptible list to starboard. He knew what that meant. The explosion had opened the plates in the ship's hull. The holds were rapidly filling with water.

He took down the life ring and stepped to the bulwarks. Below him on the glittering water, the gig was pulling away from the ship. From the mass of men in it he heard a cry:

"Joe Macaroni—jump!"

With all his strength he threw the life ring far out upon the gentle swells. Then he jumped to the rail, stood poised there for an instant, and dove. The water hit him. He was racing through the dark depths of the sea. He struck out with both arms and forced himself to the surface. The coat dragged at his arms, but he found

himself within reach of the white lifebuoy, and, pushing it ahead of him, he swam out toward the gig.

Hands reached down and pulled him over the gunwale. "I thought yer was a goner," Toppy shrilled. "Wot did yer go back fer?"

Tod wiped a hand across his dripping brow. He saw that Captain Barry sat in the sternsheets with Gallardo on his left. Both men gazed at him without saying a word. Tod, glancing round, beheld Black Jean huddled in the prow of the gig, evidently as far as possible from the men in the stern. There was not a single unfamiliar face in the boat. Who, then, had peered at him from the fore-castle doorway?

Four seamen were pulling out toward the lights of a steamer approaching from the north. Obviously, it had been attracted by the flaring blaze of the *Congo*, which, across a path of molten gold, was like a great torch ablaze in the night.

Around the bows of the ship, the other lifeboat now put in an appearance; instead of pulling toward the gig, she moved to pick up two seamen who had apparently jumped into the water from the fore-castle head. Bruce must be in that boat, Tod knew. The gunwales dipped precariously near the water. When the two swimmers were taken in, the boat swung on again.

With measured strokes, the little gig followed the larger lifeboat toward the approaching steamer. "I wonder if the bloomin' thing is boun' fer London," Toppy whispered, as they drew near. "Lookit 'er paint! Ain't she the fancy thing!"

Tod did not reply. He was working upon a puzzling thought that had just taken shape. The captain's voice roused him only slightly. "What ship is that?" Captain Barry called across the water.

Tod turned and saw dark forms lining the rails of a great white freighter. From her bridge came back a reply,

"The *Margaret Denton*, bound out of New York for New Orleans."

Captain Barry stood tense for a second, then he dropped to his seat beside Gallardo. "She must be making her trial trip," he muttered to his companion. "She's the newest one of the fleet."

The *Margaret Denton* lost headway as the two boats came up under her starboard bow. A group of men on deck were lowering the accommodation ladder, which was finished with shining brass. A moment later, the boats grated against the landing platform, the painters were grasped and made fast, and the men clambered out.

Tod met Bruce swinging up the steps. "I was wondering, old chap, if you were safe in the gig," he remarked cheerily. He looked up at the deck and of a sudden came to a halt. "There's the pater!" He sprang upward. "Hello, Dad!" he sang out.

Gallardo pushed his way ahead. "I've two men here to lock up," Tod heard him say. "Yes, two men—the nigger mess man and the skipper."

Tod paused; his hands clutched the rail with a quick movement. Through his mind, which had been working with feverish intensity during every moment that he sat in the gig, now flashed a thought that fairly staggered him. His last strand had taken shape. Before his eyes, the burning *Congo*, the rescuing ship, the men with their voices raised in greetings and curses, all meant nothing. His pattern was forming, a pattern so amazing, so incredible, yet withal so simple that he almost gasped. Gallardo was locking up Captain Barry and Black Jean! The absurdity of it made him laugh aloud. For he had solved the puzzle of the jinx.



CHAPTER VI

THE LAST OF THE JINX

"MR. DENTON WANTS TO SEE YOU IN THE CAPTAIN'S OFFICE, SIR."

Tod Moran gave the man an abstracted nod. The seaman of the *Margaret Denton* went quietly out and closed the cabin door, leaving Tod sitting on the edge of the bed. Bruce had left him there in Mr. Denton's cabin half an hour before; but he had not yet finished changing into dry clothes. He had been gazing fixedly at a small piece of paper in his hand on which was a government seal. Now he rose with a satisfied air and switched off the light; his pattern was at last complete.

He stopped for several minutes to gaze out the port at the burning ship. The *Margaret Denton* was standing by, perhaps a half mile from the doomed *Congo*, waiting for the old tramp to go down. Tod watched the blazing decks without a quiver; his mind was too busy with his amazing solution to dwell upon the last moments of the jinx ship. He turned, went down a passageway brilliantly lighted and shining with white paint, and knocked upon a door marked: Captain.

"Come in," said a voice.

Tod entered a luxuriously furnished saloon and found Bruce and his father deep in discussion with the gray-haired master of this newest ship of the Denton fleet of cargo carriers. The three sat around a table, and at Tod's entrance, Mr. Denton motioned him to a chair. Bruce's father, he observed, was a man of distinguished appearance. His face was strong and kindly; his hair was turning gray at the temples. "My prodigal son has been telling

us about you," he said with a smile. "This is Captain Spaulding. We are making a trial trip, so we thought we'd look up the *Congo*. We've been getting some strange reports of her, but we hardly expected to find her afire and a total loss."

"You look more fit, old chap," Bruce remarked. "Our troubles are over. You were right—everything that Mr. Sharp and the skipper said about the pater was simply to throw us off the course."

Mr. Denton smiled. "Well, you boys have done well. We have the Negro mess and the captain locked below in the brig. Mr. Gallardo has charge of them."

Tod moved slightly in his chair. His eyes gleamed with sudden feeling. "You haven't yet found the right man," he said in a breathless voice.

Bruce threw back his head and laughed. "Tod has been using his little gray cells again," he explained. "He weaves rugs, too. Is this your latest masterpiece?"

"The same one, Bruce. But it's finished now."

Mr. Denton took two cigars from his pocket and passed one to Captain Spaulding. "You'd better explain yourself, young man," he said, turning to Tod. "Just when we agree that, except for the loss of the *Congo*, everything is settled, you come in and throw our ideas askew. What is it you have on your mind?" He lighted his cigar and leaned back. Tod saw a twinkle of mirth in his eyes.

"All right," Tod shot out. "I'll begin. . . . Bruce has told you, of course, about the murder of French Louie and of Mr. Sharp's disappearance? Well, we've been trying to find out who was guilty of both crimes, because we felt that those two disappearances were back of this jinx."

"That's true," Mr. Denton admitted. "You see, the *Congo* met with an accident upon her maiden voyage years ago. Nothing occurred after that to give the ship a bad name until Captain Barry took charge of her. For two years, now, we've found that the crew always refused to make more than one voyage. That, of course,

was the work of the captain and his second officer. They were carrying on this illegal trade unknown to the company, taking only a few cases of arms and ammunition each trip. Naturally, they realized that, if the same crew stayed with them, suspicion would be aroused. They saw that a new crew must be signed on at New York for each voyage out. Yes, that's explained. Mr. Gallardo just left this cabin. He's a wonderful type of government agent, Moran, brilliant, resourceful, courageous. He has locked up the captain and the mess. The Negro was guilty of both crimes."

Tod slowly shook his head. "No, sir. Black Jean is not guilty."

Bruce leaned forward. "What do you mean, Tod?"

"You won't believe me unless I explain from the beginning," Tod said. His eyes were shining with eagerness. He plunged ahead at once. "I've been putting my stray strand in place. My rug is finished. . . . You remember, Bruce, that I told you that only an officer could have entered French Louie's cabin and struck him down. I had eliminated everyone but Captain Barry and Mr. Sharp. Finally, it went down to the second mate only. I thought he was the guilty one. Then he disappeared—vanished in somewhat the same manner as French Louie did. It looked to me like the work of the same man. If it wasn't Mr. Sharp, who could it have been? . . . So with this new knowledge I started all over again. Who else, I asked myself, could have entered the sick bay while Louie was armed and watching? Who could have come as a friend? Only one person—Gallardo."

"What!" cried Bruce. "You're not really serious, Tod."

"Yes—it was Gallardo. As soon as I realized that only Gallardo could have done it, I began to see how that fitted into the pattern. Gallardo must be more than he appeared to us. He must be the head of this contraband traffic. Doesn't that fit? When he had to leave San Felipe because of trouble with the Papaloi, he saw that, if

Brixton would distribute arms at that end, they could both make thousands of dollars. Next he must have a ship. He got in touch with Captain Barry of the *Congo*. But they must also have the second mate in with them—the mate who handled the cargo. That explains why Mr. Sharp refused to be promoted to first officer. He had to keep charge of the loading and unloading; he couldn't let that pass into another's hands."

The three others were listening with interest now. Not once did they interrupt. "Then what happened?" Tod went on. "We can't be sure; but these four men, Brixton, Gallardo, and the two officers, must have become suspicious of each other. Gallardo especially. He must have thought that Brixton was making more at his end than he admitted. That was why Gallardo was taken as a cabin passenger. Captain Barry dared not refuse him. That, too, was why Bruce and I found the skipper and second mate none too friendly with their passenger. Gallardo reached San Felipe and drove Brixton to his death. When I told him how Brixton died, Gallardo actually smiled. At that smile, I knew that here was a man who had a heart of iron, a man who would stop at nothing. That explained Mr. Sharp's disappearance, too. Mr. Sharp and Gallardo must have been fighting over the division of their money. Black Jean saw them. In the darkness of the after deck, he saw a man tall and slender throw the second mate over the bulwarks. That explains, too, why Captain Barry was so haggard, so terror-stricken. He must have realized that it was the passenger's work, that perhaps his own turn would come next. He alone remained, who knew that Gallardo was the head of this business. Perhaps he saw his danger growing; a menace hung over him every minute."

Mr. Denton took his cigar from his mouth and asked slowly, "But I don't understand yet. Gallardo is the government agent."

"Have you any proof?" Tod asked.

Mr. Denton shook his head. "Good heavens, no! We didn't think of that."

"Gallardo is not the secret agent. You remember, Bruce, that it was you who suggested up there in the radio shack that Gallardo was the government agent. He jumped at the idea—clever man that he is! He threw us off the course there. That would give him an opportunity to take charge of the skipper when they reached port."

"Ah, I begin to see," broke in Captain Spaulding. "When we reached port, he would walk off with his prisoner and both would disappear. Doubtless they've made plenty of money during these two years."

"But, Tod," Bruce said, puzzled. "That doesn't explain French Louie."

"Yes, it does. Now for the first time French Louie really fits into the pattern. We thought all along that Louie's death was an accident, that he had been mistaken for Gallardo. *It was not an accident, but a cleverly planned affair.*"

"What do you mean, old chap?"

"I mean that French Louie was the government agent!"

The three stared at him in amazement. "Now, do you see how the pattern works out?" Tod went on. "It is perfectly plain now. . . . Gallardo learns somehow that a secret agent is aboard. We don't know how he learns this; but he is so clever that perhaps he realizes that the government is on his trail—that it is time to quit. Perhaps this was to be their last load of contraband. Let's say that Gallardo only suspects that an agent is aboard. He looks over the captain's papers and finds only two men on the *Congo* who are without sea experience—Bruce, as wiper, and Louie Moreau as a coal-passer. What does he do then? He concocts that story of someone trying to get into his cabin and comes back to the firemen's quarters to get help. He knows that, if Louie is really an agent, he would take the opportunity to gather evidence about the old tramp. When Gallardo makes his proposal that one of us go to

sick bay that night, I offer to go; but already French Louie steps forward. Gallardo, of course, chooses him; his suspicions then, are correct. Louie imagines that here is his chance. He, of course, suspects the officers. Louie walks right into the cleverly planned trap.

"What happens then? Gallardo plays his part well. No one suspects *him*. I go to call French Louie for his watch and find him with a knife in his heart. Where is Gallardo? Near by. He suddenly realizes that he has left a knife which will be a clue. While I stumble aft, Gallardo unlocks the door and throws the body overboard. Then he takes his place again outside Jean's cabin and announces that Jean could not possibly be guilty. At that time he was not willing to attempt to charge Jean with the crime; but now, seeing that things are getting tight for them all, he locks Jean up, thinking that no one would believe in the mess man's innocence; at least, not till he gets to port—and that is all that Gallardo wants. Once in port, he and the captain are safe."

"It sounds all right, Tod," said Bruce, slowly nodding; "but when you showed me your first little pattern with Mr. Sharp as the guilty one, it looked right too. What proof have you?"

"Yes, what proof?" asked Mr. Denton intently.

Tod smiled. "I don't really need any proof. The pattern shapes itself so well that none is needed. But I've got proof—now. . . . When I found Black Jean hiding in the shaft alley, he told me of seeing a fight one evening on deck. Someone had thrown Mr. Sharp overboard. He said it was French Louie's ghost. I laughed at that; but it gave me an idea. What did we know of French Louie? Who was he? Why had we all along been so certain that his death had been a mistake on somebody's part? French Louie! That was my weak strand. . . . I went aft to our quarters and looked for his clothes. All had been taken away except the coat. In a lining, something was sewed."

"What was it?"

Tod reached into his trouser pocket. "This." Without another word he brought forth a paper slightly wet, glanced at it with a smile of triumph, and passed it to Mr. Denton.

"A government seal!" Mr. Denton cried. "Why, this is an order from Washington, giving Louis Moreau orders to proceed to the steamship *Congo* and investigate." He looked up with gleaming eyes. "Moran, let me take your hand! You've learned to use your brains."

Captain Spaulding rose abruptly. "Good heavens! Gallardo is roaming these decks!"

"Can you get Captain Barry in here," Mr. Denton asked quickly, "without Gallardo suspecting?"

The captain nodded. He stepped to his desk and brought forth two revolvers. One he passed without a word to Mr. Denton; the other he slipped into his pocket. Then he went out the door.

Bruce was regarding Tod with shining eyes. "Old thing, you've sure put one over on us."

Mr. Denton nodded. "With all this evidence, Bruce," he said, "why didn't you see the truth as well?"

Bruce laughed shortly. "You see, Dad, I haven't yet learned to use my little gray cells."

"I'm well aware of that fact. But it's time you had."

A few moments later, Captain Spaulding returned with Captain Barry. The little master of the *Congo* was nervous and haggard. His lips twitched.

"Now, tell us your story, Barry," Mr. Denton said kindly. "We know you adopted this gun-running game to make extra money. But we feel sure you had nothing to do with this murder of Louis Moreau."

Captain Barry wiped a gnarled hand across his brow. "It's true, Mr. Denton. Ye pay so little that I couldn't make a go of it. But I'm not excusing myself. I thought I'd make a little extra and nobody would be the wiser. But that ship finished me. Yes, sir, she's a jinx for everybody on board. She was laughing at us!"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Denton put in.

"Oh, Mr. Sharp and I tried to keep those stories going all right. Ye know how it is at sea. Ye start a rumour in the morning and by night it has grown till ye don't even recognize it. Then I began to feel that there was some truth in it myself. The ship was alive, I tell ye! She knew what was going on. She was laughing at me—driving me mad!"

Mr. Denton nodded. "I think I understand. Bring in Gallardo, Captain Spaulding."

The master of the *Margaret Denton* went to the door and gave an order.

Tod sat in silence while Mr. Denton thoughtfully puffed at his cigar. A few moments later, Gallardo entered. He paused in the doorway, smiling. "Good-evening, gentlemen." His keen glance swept the little group, and, as his eyes rested on Captain Barry, Tod saw them narrow perceptibly. "A little inquiry, eh? Well, I have my nigger prisoner safe below deck. He's a desperate one, gentlemen. I don't think, however, that you should have brought Captain Barry here without my permission. I am in charge, you know."

Mr. Denton spoke quietly. "I suppose you have your government orders with you?"

Mr. Gallardo's dark glance never wavered. "No—I did not bring any. It doesn't do, you know. What if someone should find them? When we reach New Orleans, I shall get in touch with government officers. You will find everything all right."

"Undoubtedly." There was a slightly sarcastic tone in Mr. Denton's voice. Tod saw that Captain Spaulding stood directly behind the man, ready for emergency. Gallardo shot a keen glance at Bruce's father. The man was alert, suspicious. Evidently he was wondering how much they had learned from Captain Barry.

"I think I had better take my prisoner back, yes?"

Mr. Denton rose and, with a stern look, faced the

man. "There will be no need of your help, Gallardo. We understand everything. We know that you killed the coal-passer who called himself Louis Moreau—the real government agent!"

At the words, Gallardo stiffened. His smooth-shaven face, dark where the beard showed through, twitched slightly.

"Don't move, Gallardo!" Mr. Denton snapped out. "Captain Spaulding is behind you and has you covered."

Gallardo's face drew into a frown of hatred as he gazed across the table at Captain Barry. "I suppose," he snarled, "that that weakling there has told you everything."

Captain Barry sprang to his feet. "I haven't said a word, Gallardo."

"Whose work is this, then?" The man's eyes narrowed to glinting points of light.

Captain Barry's throat moved convulsively. "It was the *Congo's* work—that's whol!" He raised a trembling hand and pointed out the port to the lighted sea. "See her burn? . . . She's going down—an' I'm glad of it! I tell ye, she was the cause. She's a jinx!"

At the storm of curses that burst from Gallardo Captain Spaulding opened the door and motioned to several men who entered at his command.

Tod pushed back his chair and went on deck.

Across a fiery path on the water, flames were leaping high into the night from the burning ship. The *Congo's* deck was already awash. Tod stood by the rail of the promenade deck, his heart thudding as he saw the old tramp steamer dying before his eyes.

"The bloomin' jinx is a goner now," said a voice at his elbow.

He turned to see Toppy step to his side. The little cockney was stroking a black cat in his arms. "Where'd you get Max?" Tod asked.

Toppy lowered his voice. "I wanted to see if the blarsted cat was real." He grinned. "The bloomin' crew

of this fancy ship said the cat belonged to them now. They must 'a' thought we was 'arf looney. Blimey, they locked up the mess."

"Jean will soon be out."

"Do you ever think I'll git to London, Joe Macaroni? He sighed, then his face lighted up. "Maybe now that we're off that blarsted ship, I'll have luck again."

Tod chuckled. "Sure, Toppy, you'll get one of those cotton carriers bound for London."

"I 'opes so," Toppy said, none too brightly, as he moved aft.

A hand touched Tod's arm as Bruce Denton joined him at the rail. "She's about gone, old chap. Let her go! We're off for home. What are you doing when we make New Orleans?"

"I'm going home and then to college," Tod answered in a cheery voice. "I'm entering Stanford this fall."

"Well, I'm going with you."

"What!" Tod turned eagerly. "You mean it?"

"Sure I do," Bruce laughed. "I told the pater I wanted to start all over again, and he agrees. He said if you can't teach me how to use my little gray cells no one can and I'm hopeless. We'll be room mates."

"But I've got to work part time while I'm there," Tod explained.

Bruce gave him a glance of affectionate delight. "Wait till you hear the pater's orders to me. He says he spoiled me with a motor and too much money, so now I've got to work, too. I told him I'd become an excellent mess boy. I'll probably hash for my meals."

Tod chuckled. "I guess we'll get along."

Bruce looked across at the burning ship, and Tod followed his glance. The *Congo's* forecastle and port beam had already slid beneath the water, but from her midship structure tongues of fire still leaped hungrily upward.

"Do you know, old chap," Bruce murmured, "I al-

most believe Captain Barry is right. That ship was really a jinx."

Tod snorted in disgust. "Sure she was a jinx—to those who thought so!"

They stood there by the rail in silence till Bruce suddenly put out his hand. "Look!" he cried. "She's going!"

Steam rose in a white haze as the decks slid under. One last flame shot up into the luminous blue of the sky, slowly dissolved, and fell in a cloud of quivering sparks. Darkness closed down, and the waters of the Gulf once more lay placid under the stars.



APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF NAUTICAL TERMS

A. B.: An Able-bodied Seaman. One who has passed the required examination showing that he has had training and experience which fit him for all the duties of a sailor. He receives a higher rating and more pay than an ordinary seaman.

Abaft: Behind.

Aft: Toward stern of ship.

Amidships: In or toward the middle of a ship, especially with regard to her length.

Athwart: Across the length, direction, or course of a ship.

Barometer (ba-rom'-e-ter): An instrument which tells the pressure of the atmosphere; hence, foretells changes in weather.

Barratry: Maritime law: A fraudulent breach of duty on the part of a master of a ship to the injury of the owner of the ship or cargo.

Batten down: To cover with tarpaulins and fasten down to hatch combings with battens and wooden wedges. Chips, the carpenter, does this.

Bells: One bell is struck on the bridge at 12:30; two bells at 1 o'clock; three bells at 1:30; and so on every half hour until eight bells strikes 4 o'clock. Then one bell strikes again at 4:30, etc.

Berth: (1) Convenient sea room in which a ship can manoeuvre. (2) The place where a ship lies at anchor or at a wharf. (3) A job. Three berths are open on cargo carriers to inexperienced youths: mess boy, ordinary seaman, and wiper in the engine room.

Bilge: The space beneath lowest inner deck and bottom of a ship where oil and leakage collect. This is pumped out at regular intervals.

Binnacle: Case or stand containing compass.

- Bits:** Two iron castings on deck which secure hawsers or cables when ship is tied to dock.
- Black Gang:** Stokers and engine-room men. The Black Gang is always housed separately from the deck crew, as ill feeling between the two factions seems to be a tradition.
- Boat deck:** Upper deck where lifeboats are kept.
- Boatswain** (bo'-sun): Petty officer in charge of deck crew.
- Bollard:** Upright iron post on wharf for securing a ship's hawsers.
- Bridge:** Highest platform running across midships structure where officer in command takes his station.
- Brig:** A cabin below deck where a prisoner may be kept. Also a two-masted, square-rigged vessel.
- Bulkhead:** Upright partition separating compartments.
- Bulwarks:** Steel plates forming the rail along sides of main deck.
- Bunkers:** Large compartments for coal used in the furnaces.
- Chartroom:** Cabin on the bridge where nautical charts, chronometers and code flags are kept.
- Chock:** A casting at side of deck for ropes to run through.
- Chronometer:** An exact nautical timepiece.
- Coal-passer:** Person who works in bunkers, shovelling coal down to stokers in fire room. On British steamers called a trimmer.
- Companionway:** Steps or their passageway leading to and from deck below.
- Davits** (dav'-its): A pair of curved arms having a tackle to hoist or lower a lifeboat.
- Deck head:** Ceiling of cabin.
- Derelict** (der'-e-lict): A vessel abandoned at sea.
- Donkey's breakfast:** Old sailors' term for a straw mattress.
- Dungarees:** A waist overall; this with the singlet, or thin white undershirt, comprises a seaman's main apparel.
- Dunnage:** (1) Wood or matting used in stowing cargo. (2) Slang term for a seaman's personal effects.
- Fiddle:** A light narrow rack on edge of table to keep dishes from falling to deck in heavy weather.
- Fiddley:** Uppermost part of stokehole. An iron ladder leads through this to deck.

Forecastle (fok'-s'l): Forward compartment in bows where crew bunks. Though on many steamers the wipers and firemen are often housed in the ship's stern, their quarters are nevertheless known as the firemen's forecastle.

Forecastle head: Deck in bow of ship over forecastle.

Galley: Kitchen. Here the cook holds sway; and woe to him who enters without permission!

Gunwale (gun'-nel): Upper edge of a boat's side.

Hatch: Square opening in deck through which cargo is lowered into holds. At sea these are covered with planks and tarpaulins.

Hawser: A large rope for securing ship to dock.

Helm: An arm secured to the rudder post, operated by the steering wheel.

Hold: Compartment below deck where cargo is stowed.

Jetty: A landing wharf or pier.

Jinx: Stories of jinx ships are told in every port. As a rule, a vessel first acquires a reputation for ill luck by an accident on her maiden voyage. If other accidents follow, she is said to be a jinx.

Knot: A unit of speed, equivalent to one nautical mile (6,080.27 feet) an hour.

Landfall: Sighting or making land.

Leeward: The protected side, away from wind.

Lighter: A flat-bottomed barge used in unloading from ship where no wharves can be reached.

Limejuicer: Name given to British seamen because of the old custom of giving limejuice to English sailors in tropics to keep them immune from scurvy.

Log: (1) Apparatus for measuring the rate of a ship's progress through water, originally a triangular block fastened to a line astern. Patent logs are now used which click off the nautical miles. (2) Daily record of a ship's voyage.

Log book: Book in which the record of a ship's voyage is kept.

Lot's Wife: Salt.

Lubber: An unskilled seaman.

Officers on deck: Captain is in command; under him is the first mate who takes his four-hour watch twice a day on bridge and usually takes orders to the deck crew; the second mate

in turn stands duty on bridge, and usually has charge of cargo; third mate. The petty officers are the quartermasters who steer the ship, and one boatswain who has charge of men's work on deck.

Officers of engine room: chief engineer, first assistant engineer, second engineer, and third engineer.

Old Man: The skipper, the captain.

Ordinary seaman: One who has not yet received Able-bodied Seaman's certificate. He receives lower rating and less pay than an A. B.

Pilot boat: Usually a schooner with auxiliary engines which cruises outside the harbour entrance in order to put bar pilots aboard arriving steamers, and take them off departing vessels.

Poop deck: Deck at stern over quarters.

Port: Left side of vessel as one on board faces toward bow. Opposite to starboard. Port light on ship's bridge is red.

Porthole (port'-hole): A small round window in vessel's side, with two covers which clamp shut, one of glass, the other of steel.

Quartermaster: A petty officer who stands a wheel watch, takes soundings, attends to code flags, etc.

Rigging: Ropes and cables that support the masts.

Screw: Propeller.

Scuppers: Holes in bulwarks to carry off water from deck.

Seamen's Institute: A home for the men of the merchant marine while on land. A Seamen's Church Institute is found in every port of the United States and, in one form or another, in every large seaport of the world. They vary in accommodation. The San Francisco Institute offers less than most—only a reading room with books of a past generation, and a desk where mail may be called for, or forwarded. Galveston offers a most pleasant, home-like Institute which is privately operated by one religious order only. New York, although it offers more accommodations than any other in the States, is known to seamen as the "jail," from its barred windows and four policemen who, day and night, patrol the entrance and lobby. Here in large dormitories with bunks two tiers high, a bed may be had for thirty-five cents a night.

A shower bath costs fifteen cents; the privilege of washing clothes, twenty-five cents; meals at standard New York prices. Seamen who are penniless, a not unusual occurrence, are allowed to remain in the Institute lobby until midnight, when the police send them forth to seek a bench in Battery Park or a dark nook along the dockside.

Shaft alley: The long tunnel containing the propeller shaft, running from the engine room to the stern.

"Shooting the sun": Taking the altitude of the sun to tell position of ship at sea.

Sick bay: Hospital cabin.

Slum: Contraction of slum gullion, a stew.

Soogey: Contraction of soogey moogey, a solution of soda and water for washing paintwork.

Sounding: Measurement made by a line and plummet; or the depth of the water so ascertained.

Sou'wester: An oiled hat with flap at back for use in stormy weather; or a gale from southwest.

Sparks: The radio operator.

Spindrift: Spray blown from waves during gale.

Spume: Froth and foam.

Squarehead: Any Teutonic or Scandinavian seaman.

Stanchion: An upright bar used as a support for rail or deck awning.

Starboard: That side of a vessel on right of a person on board facing forward. On ship's bridge, the starboard light is green.

Stevedore: A longshoreman; one who loads or unloads a vessel in port.

Stokehole: Fire room on coal-burning vessel.

Stoker: Member of the Black Gang who tends furnace on a coal-burner.

Strake: One breadth of plates forming a continuous strip along length of ship's side.

Superstructure: That part of a vessel built above the main deck. It comprises the bridge, officers' cabins, galley, etc.

Taffrail: Rail around a ship's stern.

Tarpaulin: Canvas waterproofed with oil or paint, used for covering hatches.

Telegraph dial: Disc and indicator which rings orders between bridge and engine room. Indicator points to Full Speed Ahead, etc.

Thwart: A rower's seat across a boat.

Tramp steamer: A cargo carrier which has no regular ports of call. Because of her age and appearance, she has usually been discarded from routes along the well-charted lanes of travel, and is sent to remote ports where, at proper seasons, a cargo of raw material is apt to be awaiting shipment. Often these tramps lead a will-o'-the-wisp existence.

Trim ventilators: Turn to windward. In passing through the twisting Panama Canal, a wiper is kept on the boat deck during the eight-hour passage to trim stokehole ventilators.

Wake: Path left astern of ship by the churning of propeller.

Watches at sea: The twenty-four hours of the day are divided into working shifts of four hours each. A man may be on watch in the morning from eight till twelve; then off for eight hours; then on again from eight in the evening till midnight. Part of the deck crew and the wipers in the engine room generally work a straight day shift.

Winch: Form of windlass for loading and unloading cargo.

Wind-dodger: Canvas placed on open bridge to protect officer on duty from wind.

Windlass: Machine for winding in cable; a revolving drum.

Wiper: A worker in the engine room who polishes brass, wipes up oil, etc. This is only job open to inexperienced men in the engine room of a steamer; so is generally held by youths making a first trip below deck.

Wheel-house: A small deck house on a ship's bridge containing wheel, binnacle, telltale, clock and bell.

THE JINX SHIP



Young Tod Moran didn't believe in jinx ships when he signed on the Congo, but the rest of the crew did. Then one of them disappeared!



Strange things continued to happen on the old tramp freighter. Tod discovered a clue as a West Indian hurricane disabled the ship.



Going ashore for help, he ran into a voodoo uprising, then another disappearance, and finally a fire in the Congo's mysterious cargo.

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